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IN THE CHAIR

MARTYN BROWN

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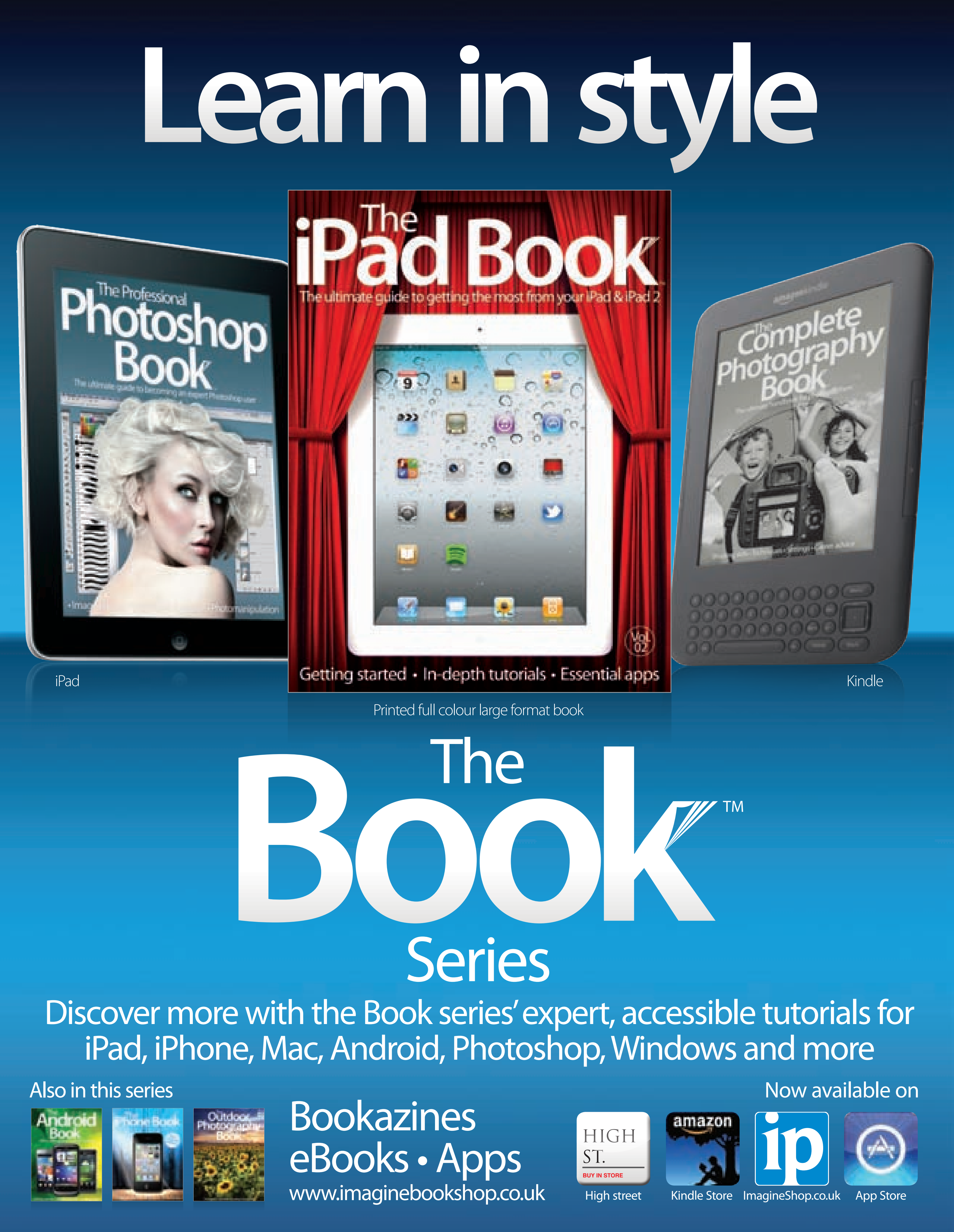
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HOW COLECO'S CONSOLE TOOK ON ATARI'S 2600 – AND NEARLY WON

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THE UNCONVERTED
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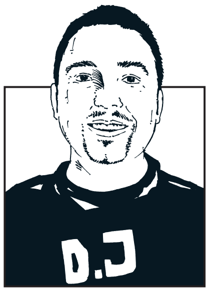
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RETRO GAMER* LOAD 73


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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ULTIMATE GAME?



DARRAN JONES

It will always be *Sabre Wulf* for me. I have fond memories of going round my next-door neighbour's after school and taking it in turns to play and map out the huge game world.

Expertise:
Juggling a wife, two beautiful girls and **Retro Gamer**

Currently playing:
Borderlands

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Toughie, but I would have to plump for the excellent *Gunfright*. It might not star Sabreman, but I love its Western setting and the fact that you get to chase down outlaws.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
Bayonetta

Favourite game of all time:
Bayonetta



JASON KELK

I'd have to say the amazing conversion of *Jetpac* to the VIC-20, a game that stole hours of my adolescence.

Expertise:
Failing to start playground fights.

Currently playing:
Genetos and *Ifrit* (PC)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

I never really got into any of the Ultimate adventures, preferring more action-oriented than cerebral fare. To that end, the slightly bonkers *Pssst* is my fave game from the company.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control

Currently playing:
Orbital (iPhone)

Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



ANDREW FISHER

Entombed on the C64. It was the best of the Arthur Pendragon games with its fabulous Egyptian atmosphere and fiendish puzzles

Expertise:
Commodore 64

Currently playing:
The Beatles: Rock Band

Favourite game of all time:
The Sentinel



DAVID CROOKES

Now that's a difficult question. But I do have very fond memories of *Jetpac*, because I played it with my first crush sitting next to me. Reason enough?

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

I've always had a soft spot for *Trans Am*. It's just so fast and immediate, and easily the game I played the most on my first 16K Speccy. Who needed 48K anyway?

Expertise:
8-bits and bobs

Currently playing:
Manic Miner (SAM Coupé)

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



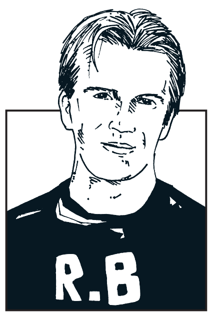
IAIN LEE

My favourite was *Sabre Wulf* on any format. I much preferred it over those isometric games. They looked great but were always a little slow.

Expertise:
Pretending to be American while playing on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
FIFA 10

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (BBC Model B)



RICHARD BURTON

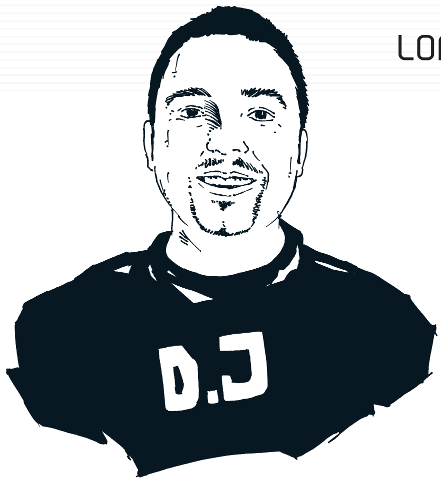
Although the earlier 3D isometric games were jaw droppers, I always preferred the 2D Ultimate era with Sabre Wulf just edging out Atic Atac as it offered more of a challenge.

Expertise:
Stuff, nonsense and stuff

Currently playing:
GBA Sabre Wulf

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...



One of the things I love about the games industry is how everything usually comes around full circle. We'll soon be able to hang out in arcades again – albeit virtual ones – and a seemingly unstoppable force, Sony, has been toppled by a rival that was once languishing in last place.

At the moment I've been quite interested with all the spin that's being put forward about Natal, the PlayStation 3's new motion controller and the Wii's Vitality Bar. All of these products are being pushed as ways of expanding the life of existing consoles – let's not forget that we're at a time now where we'd normally be hearing rumblings about new machines. Look back at gaming's history and there's virtually no gaming expansion that successfully extended the life of a console or computer, and yet Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo seem happy to ignore history and plough on regardless.

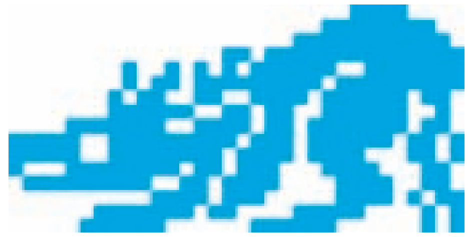
Now I'm not saying that these devices are going to be a disaster, but it does make you wonder if they would be more successful if integrated from the beginning. I'll be watching how the lifespans of each current machine pans out with great interest, but in the meantime I'm just happy that they all enable you to play old games as well as new ones.

Enjoy the magazine.





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» **Load 73** Breathing new life into classic games

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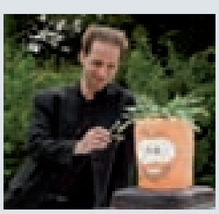


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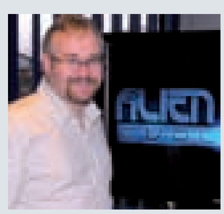




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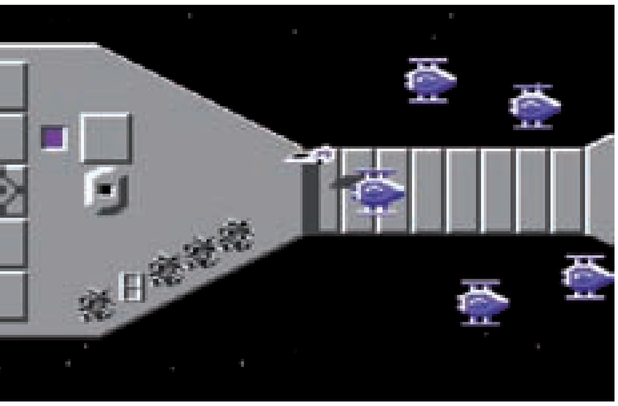
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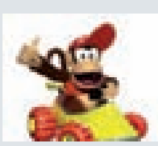
"You can't just wade in, all guns blazing"

Craig Grannell





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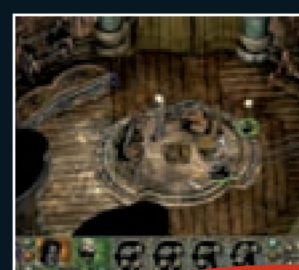






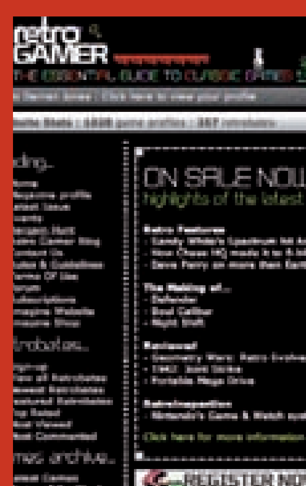
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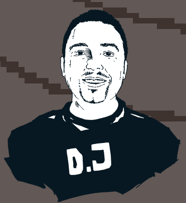
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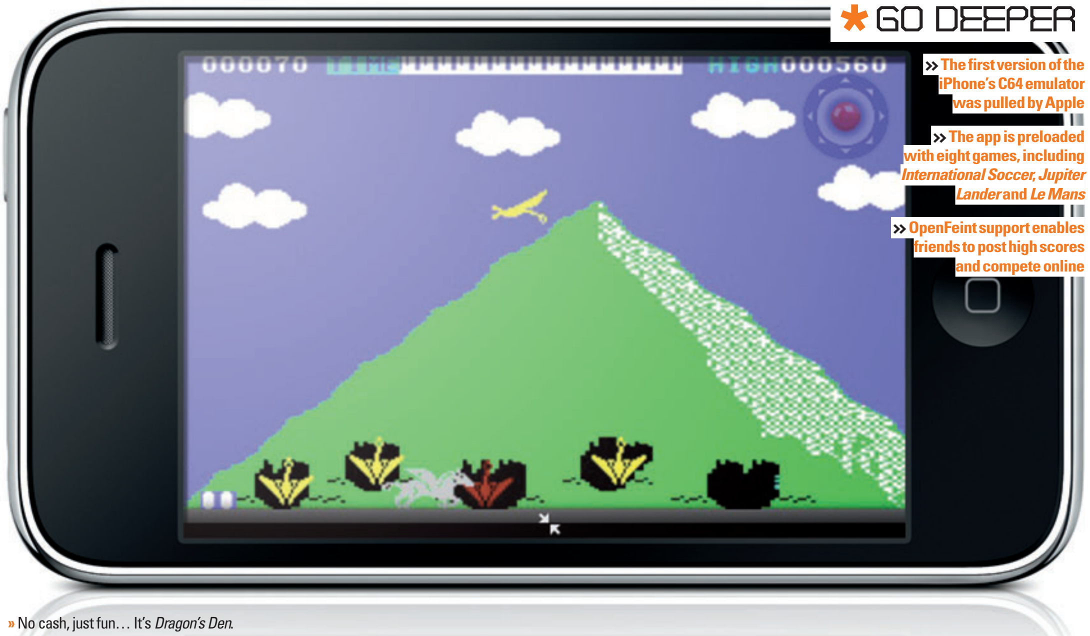
» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» There's some cracking news this month. After Burner Climax is definitely happening and Microsoft plans to reinvent the arcade scene, while Apple's iPhone continues to make itself desirable to retro gamers the world over

* CONTENTS





» No cash, just fun… It's *Dragon's Den.*

*** GO DEEPER**

» The first version of the iPhone's C64 emulator was pulled by Apple

» The app is preloaded with eight games, including *International Soccer, Jupiter Lander* and *Le Mans*

» OpenFeint support enables friends to post high scores and compete online

AMIGA EMULATOR FOR iPHONE ON ITS WAY

WITH AN IPHONE VERSION OF ITS C64 EMULATOR AND WORK UNDER WAY TO EMULATE THE AMIGA, DEVELOPER MANOMIO HAS BEEN BUSY

Two days before Christmas, Manomio released a great festive present: the 1.2 update to its excellent C64 emulator for the Apple iPhone. For the first time, gamers were able to make in-app purchases, allowing us to pick up *Alleykat, Uridium, Paradroid, Stormlord* and *Nebulous* for just 59p each.

The new update also made *Bruce Lee, Laser Squad* and *Samurai Warriors* available free via the in-app store. And although, at the time of writing, *Cybernoid* and its sequel hadn't been submitted, both games should, by the time you read this, also be ready for everyone's favourite grease-stained handheld.

Manomio is hoping that the wealth of games that it is hoping to secure and release will ensure a greater take-up of the app in 2010. With titles such as *Kickstart I* and *II, Microprose Soccer* and *Trailblazer* in the works, the £1.79 cost of the app is surely worth it. After all, without wishing to gush, it is cheaper than the £1.99 that tapes used to cost in the good old days.

"I'd say it's been a critical success," says the app's developer Stuart Carnie, strongly hinting that sales haven't been quite as expected. "The buzz the first time around, just before Apple pulled it, was huge, and we were climbing up the world charts at an incredible rate – almost to top 50 in the USA and UK on the day it was pulled and still climbing. The second time around has been okay, but no one's quitting their day job. We're hoping to add some very compelling features in future updates that may appeal to a wider audience."

> "The buzz the first time around was huge, and we were climbing the charts at an incredible rate"

Undeterred, Manomio is not about to give up. It has more updates planned and it has also been working on an Amiga emulator, which is making everyone here at **Retro Gamer** even more excited. One of the games due out is Archer Maclean's classic fighting game *IK+*, but rather than release an emulator and have in-app purchases, Manomio says that it is more likely to release individual or packaged titles as standalones, thereby masking the Amiga experience and concentrating on the games themselves.

"We've ported an Amiga system and have secured some great games," says Stuart. "It runs at full speed on a 3GS and similar hardware and at a respectable frame rate for the 3G devices. *IK+* plays very well."

Stuart is, as you can guess, a fan of Commodore's machines. He says that the C64 in particular was a platform with which he was very familiar,

And there's more…

» Why the Commodore 64 needs to be on the iPhone



Stuart Carnie talks updates

RG: Tell us more about the next update for the C64 app.
Stuart Carnie: Well, many of us remember vying for the high score and revelling with our friends when we grabbed it. Perhaps you were the best at school… but were you the best in the world? We're going to give players a chance to compare their scores with OpenFeint integration for select games.
RG: How do you extract the scores from the games?
SC: I literally have to debug each game and locate the 'end of game' code and grab the high score. I've just completed the integration of OpenFeint into C64 1.4 and used *Jupiter Lander* as the guinea pig for the first leaderboard, and you can be sure that we'll be adding *Uridium*, *Nebulus* and plenty more in the future.



We chat to Manomio co-owner Brian Lyscarz

RG: Why was the C64 special?
Brian Lyscarz: Personally, I think the hardware was incredible – particularly the SID, which allowed the C64 to stand above the competition. Games like *Last Ninja 2*, or anything Rob Hubbard or Martin Galway, had amazing soundtracks.
RG: Will you be plundering the British archives?
BL: We have *Wizball* already, but we'd welcome anyone contacting us if they know of rights holders of titles from British software houses.
RG: Will you be looking at other mobile platforms?
BL: Yes, we will definitely be looking into other platforms as they mature. Android is on its way, but we don't feel that distribution platform works well enough quite yet.



We have a natter with Jon Hare

RG: Do you still have fond memories of *Wizball*?
Jon Hare: I still enjoy *Wizball*. I'd recommend it for the annoying kids who jump around a lot, fans of an old-fashioned blast with a pretty scenario, and people who like colouring in.
RG: Do you plan to produce a new iPhone game?
JH: I'd like to produce another football game. It's a great platform and a *Sensible Soccer*-style game would work.
RG: What would you like to see in 2010?
JH: I'd like to see Norwich City promoted into the Championship, either as champions of League One or runners-up. I'd also like to see gamers become less conservative in their tastes and to buy games that offer a greater challenge than many out there.





» [iPhone] There are now new games to buy for the emulator.

having grown up with one. "I fondly remember spending my younger teen years playing *International Karate* and many other classics with friends. I did have an Atari 800XL for a short time before that, but it didn't pull the same chords that the C64 did."

With such a love of *IK*, it comes as no surprise that *International Karate* will be released for the C64 emulator, as well as System 3's other class act, *Last Ninja*. Thalamus's *Delta* is likely, as are games from Palace Software, Elite and Epyx. Manomio has the rights to *Wizball* for the emulator, "but we need to do a little work to make it work appropriately due to some bugs," says Stuart, adding: "While I can't say specifically what we're working on, I can say that the future is bright and there are some triple-A titles coming your way."



If there has been any criticism of the iPhone app, it has been the controls. Some people didn't like the joystick being on the right, but Manomio had placed it there because most players used to hold the joystick in their left hand and controlled using the right. The default is now on the left with fire on the right, which your right-handed news reporter actually felt uncomfortable with and so used the option to switch them back. In portrait mode, you can touch the screen in the general direction for movements and tap the other side of the screen to fire.

"We are working really hard on the controls and are going to experiment with some alternative options for users," says Stuart. "We figure options are the best solution, and so we're going to give more of those in future updates."

Of course, those who have been keeping an eye on news regarding the C64 app will know that the emulator almost never made it to the Apple App Store at all. Steve Jobs' crew felt that it violated the iPhone SDK agreement, and it didn't like the inclusion of BASIC in the app and was wary of the in-app purchase function. These issues have since been ironed out.

"I'm not one to dwell on things, so it's all in the past as far as I'm concerned, says Stuart. "It's thanks to the press and the incredible fans of the C64 that we're on the App Store in the first place." ✱

THE RETRO DEBATE

» What are your thoughts on the C64 app on the App Store?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

SirClive
None of the games are very good at the moment. Would love to see *Wizball*.

Bub&Bob
I think the concept is excellent, but it's just a nightmare on the control front. Also agree that the games available are not great, *Paradroid* being the only exception to that.

CraigGrannell
I've been in touch with the devs since the earliest version, and used the app since an early beta. It has improved, but it's still pretty flawed. Emulation isn't strong enough at times, the additions should be options such as the irksome screen overlay, and the controls need sorting. From conversations I've had with the developers, the last of those things is on the cards for one of the next major upgrades.

As for the included games, I admire the fact that they're going down the fully legal route and think the existing selection is reasonable, although some of the games would be a nightmare with the existing controls – especially *Uridium*.

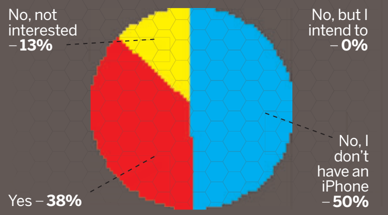
Darran
I really like the idea of this, but it needs some decent games. Bring an Archer Maclean pack out and I'll be interested.

Timothy Lumsden
My iPhone won't arrive for a few weeks, but though I like the idea of this C64 app, I think I'll stick to games and apps without issues. There seem to be so many good ones that buying apps that are less than perfect seems a bit pointless. Harsh, as I support the idea, but the world of apps seems quite Darwinian, which is probably a good thing. Now, about that duck-billed platypus emulator…

Sureshot
I don't have an iPhone and certainly prefer my games on a dedicated platform – I prefer to use my battery for actually using my phone as a communication/browsing device, not for listening to MP3s or playing games.

FORUM OPINION

Have you bought the C64 iPhone app?



retro columns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Desperately seeking Fred Harris

I finally got around to watching the BBC's drama about the Sinclair/Curry battle to build computers for the corporation – *Micro Men*. I was expecting an exciting, roller coaster ride with a few laughs; I remember that time in the early Eighties as being mystical and full of promise. Sadly, this was not conveyed in the show and it came across as being a bit dull – terribly old-fashioned direction, pedestrian dialogue for which even a retro geek like me couldn't muster much enthusiasm, and Alexander Armstrong's awful bald cap, which looked like it could fly off at any moment.

There were some light moments that made me chuckle. Clive Sinclair moaning about the number of games being made for his machines saying, and I'm paraphrasing slightly – 'I'm building these fantastic machines and all I'm going to be remembered for is *Jet Set F**king Willy*'. Annoyingly, this peach of a line was then ruined as his lackey replied 'Oh yes, my son's on level 8 of that.' LEVEL 8? Of *Jet Set F**king Willy*? Are you mental? I was so incandescent with rage at this brutal balls-up that I actually spat out my herbal tea and rewound it on the Sky+ to show my wife this hideous error. Suffice to say, she did not give a shit.

One thing the show did do brilliantly was to recreate the sets for *Micro Live* and drop in new footage with actual shots of the show. As I've probably said here before, I totally loved *Micro Live*. It was just so mysterious and, er, weird. This was THE computer show of the day, hosted by the seemingly ancient Ian Macnaught Davis, micro-MILF Lesley Judd and the wonderfully underrated Fred Harris. Fred was like your cool-yet-slightly-nerdy uncle and constantly popped up explaining what computers were and how they could make our lives easier. I remember him appearing on *Saturday Superstore* and getting a BBC Micro to say, with the help of *Speech* from Superior Software, 'Frank Bough has a cough'. Yes kids, simple things like that gave us chubbies in those days. So influential was this display that I forced my mum to take me to Boots so I could buy this miracle piece of software. We rushed back and I spent an hour trying to get the bugger to work, then spent another 15 minutes making my computer spout obscenities before getting bored and realising I'd spunked my £7.99 on what was actually a rather dull programme that I would never load up again. Oh dear.

Despite tricking me into spending 3 or 4 weeks' pocket money on something I didn't want, I still have a soft spot for Fred Harris. I'm currently trying to track him down, but he seems to have disappeared. So if anyone has any clues as to his whereabouts, let me know. I'd love to interview him. And try and get my £7.99 back.

I was so incandescent with rage at this brutal balls-up that I actually spat out my herbal tea

Best trip you've been on? Going to Kyoto and being allowed into the hallowed Nintendo headquarters to interview Shigeru Miyamoto. It was like entering Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.



» Blue skies, gut-churning action and great music. *After Burner* is back, baby.

SEGA'S AFTER BURNER HEADS TO XBOX LIVE ARCADE

PREPARE TO CLIMAX





Now here's some pretty exciting information. After persistent rumours that *After Burner Climax* had been registered to appear on Xbox Live Arcade, we've only been able to get our hands on an early preview build.

Suffice to say, it's an extremely polished port of the excellent Sega coin-op – the '*Climax*' of the title comes from a new gameplay mode that allows you to slow down time – and it's already looking like an essential purchase once it appears on the online service later on in the year.

Unlike the generally excellent *OutRun Online Arcade*, which was a cut-down port of the superb *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*, this new port of *After Burner Climax* has far more included in it than its arcade parent and is a must-play if you've never experienced it in the arcade. We'll leave the full details for our incoming review, but suffice to say that there are plenty of cool additions included to keep you playing.

A few smart Alecs from some of our sister magazines questioned the longevity of a game that can be roughly completed in just over eight and a half minutes, but after a few incredulous stares and naughty words, they soon left us alone with Sega's excellent blaster.

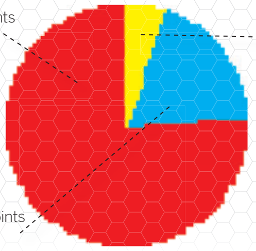
No news yet on a price point, but considering that *OutRun Online Arcade* ended up being sold for an impressively cheap 800 Points, we're expecting something similar for *After Burner Climax*. Although, if we're honest, when you consider the sheer number of extras, we'd be quite happy to fork out 1,200 Points. It really is a beautifully polished package that no *After Burner* fan should be without.

Naturally, you can expect a more detailed analysis in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**. *After Burner Climax* is currently scheduled for an April release, so best start saving those Points. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

How much would you pay for After Burner Climax?



"I put 1,600, as I'd be more than happy to pay that for FREAKIN' AFTER BURNER CLIMAX WOOOOOOOHOOOOOOOOOOO" – **Mootown**

"I think 800 Points is a fair price. If it is good enough they could offer some DLC to boost income." – **IronMaideRule**

"It's a shame there's not going to be a physical release, but I'd pay up to 1,200 for it. The game was amazing in the arcade" – **gmintyfresh**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Latest YouTube news

www.youtube.com/user/retrogamerdaz

After much deliberating, Darran has finally decided to resume his collection of every single PAL Dreamcast game. You can see his latest purchases and gameplay videos for titles like *Pro Pinball Trilogy* and *Grand Theft Auto 2* at the usual place. Oh, and the channel has nearly amassed 1,000 subscribers, so if you haven't signed up yet, be sure to check it out.



» Retro anthems

If you read our review of the excellent *Gravity Crash*, you may remember that we were really impressed with its cool retro soundtrack. Tim Wright, aka CoLD SToRage, has recently released a 16-track album, available for £9.99 from **coldstorage.bandcamp.com**. The eclectic soundtrack features everything from orchestral ambient to the SID chip and is a must-buy if you're into old-school tunes.



» A retro crusader rises

If you enjoyed our look back at Crash then you really need to watch *Classic Games Crusader: The Newsfield Years*. The digital 23-minute documentary is available for just £2.49 and interviews all the key memebers of Newsfield including Oliver and Franco Frey. It's online success will result in additional films being made in the future, so download it today from **www.classicgamescrusader.co.uk**.

Apology: In last month's *Driver* interview we incorrectly listed Tony Oakden as *Driver*'s lead programmer. We hereby apologise to the rest of the *Driver* team for this mistake.

retro columns

» PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



In-depth

I'll take a good guess that you rushed to see *Avatar* in 3D at the cinema. Me too; I thought it was the best effects movie I've seen in over a decade. Haven't seen it in 2D, and not sure I ever want to. For me, this was all about Cameron in 3D, the way it was intended. I enjoyed the story too, and fell in love with Neytiri!

I also, honestly, enjoyed the game… even in 2D. The Na'vi missions against the RDA gave me enough reasons to plough ahead, even if the action was often disappointing. I guess I shift my expectations when it comes to stuff like this. Usually I adhere to the mantra that graphics don't make the game, but I was completely wowed by Pandora in *Avatar: The Game*. I felt immersed. Then again, I also forced myself to complete *Fantasia* on the Mega Drive, and that was almost completely unplayable.

Sometimes I think the depth of gameplay comes from the imagination of the player. Like, for me, the part in *Final Fantasy VII* when Cloud is fighting against his own will to control his sword is just so powerful. Perhaps for somebody else this was just a bit weird, but so what? I believed that the ghosts in *Pac-Man* had personalities. I got a chill down my spine when the stranger in the window waved back at me in *Colossal Adventure* (apologies for the recurring games in my column, but just for examples).

Over the years, publishers have tried to second-guess what we all want in terms of depth. EA, though deserving success, went through a period of giving us stuff to unlock for almost nothing. 'Congratulations, you just looked at the screen: have a new costume for your *SSX* character!' At least Capcom made you complete *Onimusha 3* before giving you a panda suit. I'm still not sure you'd call that depth either.

Sega's *NiGHTS* had depth, because every time you played through the world changed slightly, along with the music. I played that game just for the music, in fact – flying through hoops was kind of like doodling, although I did enjoy throwing the first boss through the walls. Along similar lines, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's projects at Q-Entertainment have explored depth almost purely in terms of music.

Depth really is hard to define in games, and one man's depth could be another man's doldrums. Games used to be the same thing over and over, and you were more than pleased to get good at it. On the other end of the scale you have MMORPGs that never end, but for me feel like Facebook-meets-*Groundhog Day*.

Anyway, I'm really excited by 3D, even if we're years away from it being a common thing in videogames. It actually makes *Avatar: The Game* much more exciting, if you'll excuse me sounding so shallow. But I'm mostly looking forward to a *Mario 64* encounter for when somebody can make the 3D the depth of gameplay too.

Depth is hard to define in games… one man's depth could be another man's doldrums

What is the shortest amount of time you've ever had to review a game? Half a day. It was a flight sim for Game Boy. I think I based most of the review on the manual, then said it was rubbish.

GAME ON

MICROSOFT REVEALS PLANS TO BUILD YOUR OWN ARCADE

While Xbox Live Arcade has been home to some fantastic games over the past six months, we've been somewhat concerned with the lack of classic arcade games that are available on the service. Once upon a time you couldn't go a week without downloading at least one classic game, but lately it's been worryingly quiet.

Fortunately, that would all appear to be changing, as Microsoft used this year's CES (Consumer Electronics Show) to announce one of the most exciting additions to the Xbox 360 that we've heard about for some time.

The Game Room will be launching this spring and will be appearing on both the Xbox 360 and Windows PC.



» [360] With any luck, playing head-to-head won't cost you additional Points.

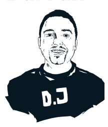
Using Avatars, players will be able to create their own arcades and fill them with a selection of classic arcade and console titles. 30 games will be available at launch, including arcade hits such as *Centipede*, *Asteroids Deluxe*, *Super Cobra* and *Lunar Lander*, and a number of Intellivision and Atari titles. Microsoft is promising 1,000 titles in a three-year period, but we've no idea if this will include games from other consoles at this time. Microsoft is also promising competitive play, online leaderboards, Achievements, and everything else you'd expect from Live, although the Game Room itself won't be found in Xbox Live Arcade.

While the ability to create our own arcade fills us with joy, we do have a few concerns about how Game Room will operate. We've no problem with the proposed price – 40 Points for a single play, 400 Points to own on Live and PC, and 240 Points to own on just one system – but quite a few things are still unclear. Will you be able to invite friends to play games they don't own? Can we import the titles that are already available on Live Arcade? Will the 40 Points be for a single game or a single session? Here's hoping these questions get answered soon. *



* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



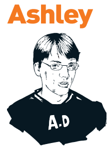
The Game Room has massive potential. I love the idea of being able to play lots of classic arcade games, and hopefully it means we'll start seeing more new games from the likes of Taito, Capcom and Konami.

Stuart



Initially I felt Games Room was simply a way for Microsoft to earn money, but having dug deeper, I now feel that it could offer an addictive and rewarding way to showcase your classic arcade and retro collection on Live.

Ashley



This is a great idea, but I'm apprehensive about what we'll see. If we end up with the same old titles, then it will be a waste of time. If it invigorates XBLA's retro scene with some long overdue interesting releases, however, I'm all for it.



WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 7

Fable II

FABLE II WAS a highly entertaining adventure, and a must-have for 360 owners everywhere. But what if it had appeared several years earlier? On the SNES?

Well, we'd imagine that it would have utilised a massive battery back-up cart, and would have taken inspiration from another popular SNES adventure: Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. Now that's something we could really sink our teeth into.



» [SNES] If *Fable II* ever appeared on Nintendo's console, then this is what it would look like.

Retro Booty

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO DEEP



Guile dressed in Charlie costume action figure

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** NECA
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Winning the award for most unnecessary toy this month is *SF2*'s Guile dressed in someone else's clothes. If this sells, perhaps Capcom will see fit to commission the Ryu action doll demonstrating his annoyance at discovering Tom Berenger has deleted the entire contents of his iPod. Here's hoping, eh?

Goomba Vinyl Action Figure

- **RRP:** £16.99
- **Manufacturer:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Find out what it feels like to spend a day in Mario's shoes by buying a thousand of these Goomba figurines and then jumping on them until they're flat and worthless. At £16.99 a pop (really!) we've worked out that that should only set you back a cool £16,990. Worth every penny though, we're absolutely sure you'll agree.





Hitman 19.5" Action Figure

- **RRP:** £184.99
- **Manufacturer:** Sideshow Collectibles
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Winning the award for most overpriced item to ever feature on these pages is this action figure of Agent 47 from the videogame *Hitman*. We suspect you'll probably have to have an unhealthy love for the character to want to fork out this kind of money for what is essentially just a large model of a bald guy in a suit.

Space Invaders Lighter

- **Price:** £4.95
- **Manufacturer:** WG Retro
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Usually we would condemn smoking… usually. But when the act of doing so allows you to use this retro-themed lighter, which is emblazoned with a regimented row of *Space Invaders* aliens, it's difficult not to want turn a blind eye to bad health and halitosis.



Pac-Man Hoodie

- **RRP:** $39.99 (£25)
- **Manufacturer:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

This full-zip hoodie was apparently special issue uniform to any and all ally sprites fighting in the great Pac War of 1988. It provided them camouflage against the game's dark neon surroundings, and allowed them to get close to the enemy's spectral forces practically unnoticed.





Zelda Ocarina

- **RRP:** $39.99 (£25)
- **Manufacturer:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Make sweet retro music with this cool blue *Zelda* ocarina; as seen in the moderately popular videogame *Ocarina Of Time* (funnily enough). Try it out: stand in a busy street, press the fairy flute to your lips, blow and simply allow the magic to happen…and by magic we mean weird fairy flute music.



8-bit tie

- **RRP:** $14.99 (£10)
- **Publisher:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

The ultimate in retro office geek chic comes in the shape of this cool pixelated tie, guaranteed to make any plain white tee look infinitely less plain. It's available in either red or blue colour variants, meaning multiplayer mode is optional.

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3

- **RRP:** deluxe hardback $40, print version $16, slim budget edition $12
- **Author:** Jeremy Parish
- **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com



If you read **games™** and enjoy the Hall Of Fame section, which takes classic and memorable videogame heroes from yesterpast and waxes lyrical about them, then you're in for a treat this month. The third issue of the excellent GameSpite Quarterly has just been launched, and offers an entertaining and funny compendium of videogames' biggest 8-bit superstars. Edited by 1UP editor Jeremy Parish, and featuring contributions from a number of writers who are clearly passionate about retro games, the book is packed with over 200 amusing tongue-in-cheek biographies of gaming's most well-loved icons. Essential bedroom reading, it's available to purchase in three formats, including a natty-looking deluxe hardback edition.



Nintendo Monopoly

- **RRP:** $39.99 (£25)
- **Manufacturer:** Parker Brothers
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Ever wondered what it would be like to buy and trade in Nintendo characters, and become all-conquering in the world of *Monopoly* at the same time? Well, wonder no more thanks to *Nintendo Monopoly*, which replaces Mayfair and Old Kent Road with popular Nintendo characters instead.

Dizzy t-shirt

- **Price:** £14.95 (£10)
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

This month's t-shirt is this eggsellent T-shaped piece of abstract fashion inspired by everyone's favourite videogame egg. We actually like the fact GT hasn't added any facial detail to the character; it allows you to personalise it with your favourite facial expression.





Space Invader Pendent

- **Price:** $19.99 (£12)
- **Manufacturer:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

The epitome of retro bling, this shiny *Space Invaders* necklace is probably off da chain (whatever that means). If anything, it'll compliment ironed white slacks, a pair of boaters and a loud Hawaiian shirt with the first top eight buttons undone brilliantly.



Street Fighter Movie Collection

- **RRP:** £16.99
- **Manufacturer:** Manga Entertainment
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

While the live-action *Street Fighter* films are laugh-out-loud terrible, the animated movies are certainly worth a watch. In this pack you get all the three anime *Street Fighter* movies, including *Street Fighter 2: The Movie (Director's Cut)*, *Street Fighter Alpha: The Movie*, *Street Fighter Alpha: Generations* plus an exclusive *Street Fighter* Digital Comic. It's a must for any *Street Fighter* nut.



I'd hit that! T-shirt

- **RRP:** $18.99 (approx £12)
- **Manufacturer:** N/A
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Apparently, tee-shirts featuring clever innuendos are said to be making a comeback in the world of low-end fashion. You know the type: ones showing a pair of peanuts with the words 'the mutt's' above them, or something. Well, this one is a little less risqué than our example, but we certainly like the retro connection nonetheless.

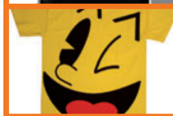
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Street Fighter II
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



05 Sonic The Hedgehog
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



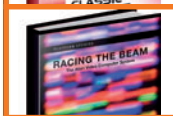
01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
- **RRP:** £8.99 ■ **Publisher:** Random House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
- **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
- **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Panzer Dragoon Music Box
- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com



02 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
- **RRP:** $14.99 (£9.23 approx)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Tetris TV Game
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Radica
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes For Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



★ A MOMENT WITH...

Martin Hollis

This month the director and producer of *GoldenEye 007* and *Perfect Dark*, talks to David Crookes about his illustrious career

Who is Martin Hollis?

He's only the man who oversaw *GoldenEye 007* at Rare, and worked on *Perfect Dark* for the first 14 months before leaving to work for Nintendo of America. He founded Zoonami – makers of *Zendoku*, *Go! Puzzle* and *Bonsai Barber* – ten years ago.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?

I think *Bonsai Barber* is a 'future game'. It is a progressive game, and I proudly recommend it. Dave Doak said: "It is a game for children and open-minded adults". I say: "It is a game for everyone, and more importantly, it's a game that family and friends can enjoy together."

What is your proudest memory?

Becoming a father. I do like to keep my private life private but I can happily say my two beautiful children certainly had a big influence on me during *Bonsai Barber*. Now I'm a father of three.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?

The most difficult thing is making a good game… that lives up to your aspirations. Making a game that matches your vision.

Which industry veteran do you admire?

Mr Iwata, an ex-programmer like myself, who used to run an independent developer (Hal Co Ltd) and now runs Nintendo. I think he's doing a great job and I very much admire him.

How would you like your games to be remembered?

I'd like them to be remembered as fun, interesting, and different. I'm not interested in making miserable games, I'm not interested in making boring games, and I'm not interested in making games that closely resemble existing games. What's the point?

Which game do you wish you'd made?

This is a hard question, and it is difficult to think of an answer. It might be there is no game I wished I had made. When I'm asked a question like this, I feel I am comfortable with myself and with my life.

What opportunities has making videogames given you?

All the opportunities I could ask for. I love games. I love working and playing to make games. In another era I would have been a writer/director, or a musician/composer, or a filmmaker. But today is different. TV is dead - it just hasn't realised yet… Interactivity is the future. Games are the future.

> "TV is dead – it just hasn't realised yet. Interactivity is the future. Games are the future"





» The character of Joanna Dark is a familiar one to gamers today and she starred in the Xbox 360 hit *Perfect Dark Zero*.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?

Darkest? *Perfect Dark*. We reorganised the ex-*GoldenEye* team, and Dave Doak and myself moved to the end office. It had no windows… I think we got depressed.

I chose to leave Rare. I did not choose to leave Rare in the middle of *Perfect Dark*. After 14 months of development I was deeply emotionally attached to *Perfect Dark*. Once I left Rare I stepped out of the games industry for six months.

And your best?

Being at Zoonami when I realized that I am where I should be… I have ambition. But I am satisfied with my progress so far. Recently people have started to say things to me like "I really like your work", and "Your games are Nintendo-y but more they are Zoonami-y". This is rewarding.

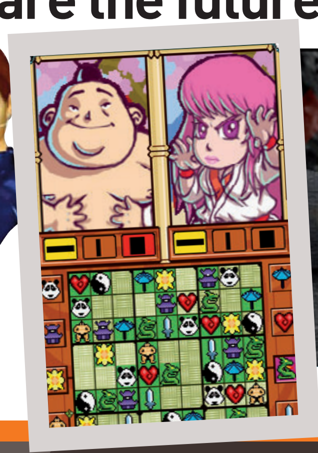
Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?

I can think of anecdotes, but I cannot think of an anecdote I am able to share… there is a lot of secrecy in the games industry.

How has the industry changed over the last 20 years?

Changes come in cycles. I remember Nintendo used to have a Famicom, which was for families to play together. And now Nintendo has a Wii, which is for families to play together.What is next? I don't know precisely. I am looking forward to it. ★



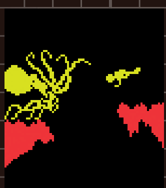




5 February–3 March

retrodiary

» A month of retro events both past and present



6 February 1983

■ Durell Software released the deep sea diving game *Scuba Dive* on the Spectrum. Watch out for that giant octopus…



6 February 1984

■ The Oric Atmos, complete with its professional-feel keyboard and stylish black and red livery, was released.



10 February 2010

■ *Sonic & Sega All-Star Racing*, featuring some of Sega's best-loved heroes, hits Wii, PS3 and Xbox 360.



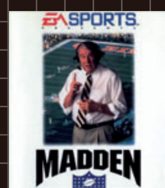
14 February 1983

■ There were waves of weird and bizarre aliens when Imagine released the colourful shoot-em-up *Arcadia* on the Spectrum.



15 February 1991

■ The third instalment of the *Bubble Bobble* series, *Parasol Stars*, made it debut on the PC Engine.



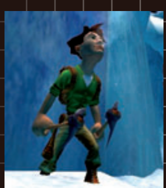
18 February 1994

■ The USA got to see the first game in the long-running sports series from EA Sports, *Madden NFL '04* for the Sega Genesis.



20 February 1987

■ Brand new , two-player run-and-gun action hit your local arcade with the release of Konami's classic *Gryzor*.



20 February 2004

■ Pitfall Harry got himself updated and reworked in 3D for the PS2 and Gamecube in *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition*.



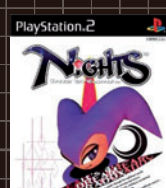
20 February 2009

■ *Street Fighter 4*, the latest edition of the famous franchise, was released in the UK on Playstation 3.



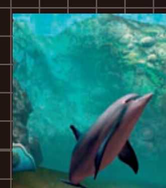
21 February 1980

■ HAL Laboratory, the Japanese games developer who brought us *Super Smash Bros*, was founded on this day.



21 February 2008

■ *NiGHTS Into Dreams*, the revered Saturn game, received a belated release on the PS2…but only in Japan… boooooo!



22 February 2002

■ The last original *Ecco The Dolphin* game, *Defender Of The Future*, was released on PS2 throughout Europe.



24 February 1994

■ *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* was released in Europe on the Mega Drive and introduced the new character of Knuckles the Echidna.



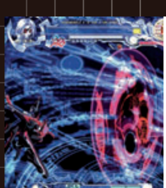
24 February 1994

■ Nintendo's SNES and the 7-Up soft drink advertising character Cool Spot come together to form a fun platform game.



25 February 2000

■ Dreamcast owners in the UK got their first taste of *Crazy Taxi* on console. Just hope you like the music of The Offspring…



26 February 2010

■ It's not retro as such, but *BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger* is a stunning 2D fighter that plays brilliantly.



27 February 2009

■ The Nintendo DS got its first look at the triumphant *Metal Slug* run-and-gun series when it was released across Europe.



1 March 1985

■ Ultimate Play The Game released *Alien 8* on the Spectrum. 'It's just *Knight Lore* in space!' everyone said in hushed tones…



1 March 1997

■ The Nintendo 64 console reached UK shores along with N64 launch titles *Pilot Wings* and *Super Mario 64*.



03 March 2010

■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 1988



FEBRUARY 1988 – SAM Coupé away, time for Tetris, Halo no go, Gargoyle rebounds, Activision hunts down Predator, Brewster hopes for millions with Zeppelin and Electric Dreams with After Burner head turner. Richard Burton loses the horizon and barrel rolls into a tree…



» The SAM Coupé was undeniably a great machine but was just too little too late.



» [Amiga] While strolling through the woods, it's not ideal to find skinned dead people hanging from trees.



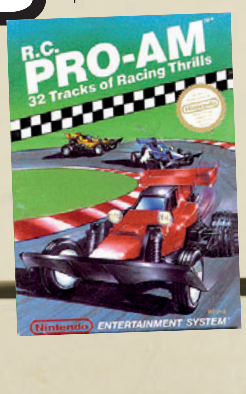
» [Commodore 64] Who would think that spinning a few coloured shapes around would make so much money…

Miles Gordon Technology announced that it was developing a new home computer. MGT wanted to provide a powerful 8-bit alternative to all the existing 8-bit owners thinking of trading up to the 16-bit standard.

Its machine, eventually named the SAM Coupé, would certainly be powerful and would give both the Amiga and Atari ST a run for their money. It also boasted that it would be MIDI compatible and be able to run a range of Spectrum software. MGT hoped that the starting price of its new micro would be under £100 and that it would arrive around August 1988.

Sadly, the price including one disk drive was nearer £250, and it wouldn't be available until December 1989, missing another Christmas sales push, which ultimately cost the company dearly. As marvellous a little machine as it was, it was too little too late, and MGT went bust six months later. SAM Computers was formed by the owners of MGT immediately after the liquidation, and they bought back MGT's assets to start afresh.

A Mirrorsoft press release publicised the forthcoming Soviet gaming phenomenon known as *Tetris*. It was the first time that a game from the Soviet Union had been made available commercially in the West. The shape-fitting puzzle game was, according to Mirrorsoft, about to take the world by storm and, to be fair, its hyperbole did live up to the expectations. It would be available imminently for most 8-bit systems, including the BBC and MSX.



» One of Rare's first NES offerings turned out to be a terrific little racer.

With last month's news that the Stamper brothers had formed a new company called Rare, it would be interesting to see what direction the new studio would take. We didn't have to wait very long to find out, with news that its first game for the NES would be available soon.

RC Pro-Am was a quirky racing game featuring remote-control cars battling over 32 different tracks. That old magic was still there and it was a deserved hit.

According to Piranha Software, it was very close to releasing its *Halo Jones* game based on the *2000 AD* character by Alan Moore and Ian Gibson. As Halo, you've got to get to and from The Hoop with your shopping. Although that brief synopsis makes it sound rather dull, early previews pointed towards something really very good.

Piranha stated that the Spectrum version would be released within the month. Unfortunately, the company went belly-up before *Halo Jones* and several other games got released, and they're still floating around in development hell.



There was budget games news aplenty, including a new software house and back catalogue purchases. Before Piranha disappeared, it did manage to offload a vast swath of its old titles onto the budget software house Alternative Software, which would be re-releasing such games as *Rogue Trooper* and the excellent isometric arcade adventure *Nosferatu The Vampyre*.

Gargoyle Games had also agreed a deal to sell its graphical adventure classics to Hewson for re-release on its Rebound label, albeit only on the Spectrum and Amstrad. £2.99 would get you *Tir Na Nog*, *Dun Darach*, *Heavy On The Magick* or *Marsport*, all of which were worth every penny.

The newest member of the Guild of Cheapo Software was Zeppelin Games, formed by Derek Brewster, who was no stranger to programming hit games himself, being responsible for such Spectrum hits as *Codename MAT* and *Jasper*. He also wrote the adventure



» [Commodore 64] With broadsword in hand, this hack-and-slash conversion of *Rastan* conveyed the arcade game very well.

1988

FEBRUARY NEWS



» Feel the rhythm. Feel the rhyme. Get on up, it's bobsled time…

13 February and it was time for the 15th Winter Olympics to open in Calgary, Canada. As usual, the UK excelled in avoiding the medals with some heroically awful performances. One man stood out with his enthusiastic but ultimately doomed ski-jumping escapades: Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards.

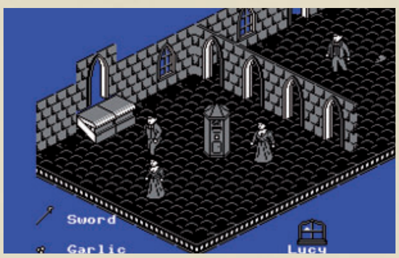
The first ever entrant by the UK for the ski jump, Eddie became a superstar, with his attempts endearing him to the crowds and TV audience alike. However, the ski-jumping fraternity accused Eddie of creating a media circus and a mockery of their sport, and qualification for future Olympics was made more stringent.

However, Eddie had the last laugh at the closing ceremony on 28 February. The president of the Olympic Committee targeted Eddie for specific praise, the first time an athlete had ever been singled out in any Olympic closing speech…


» Once again, Eddie demonstrates the precision art of ski-jumping.

"At these Games some competitors have won gold, some have broken records and one has even flown like an eagle." Within seconds the 100,000 people sat in the stadium chanted for Eddie. Makes you proud to be British!

There was more endearing failure at Calgary when the unlikely debut of the Jamaican bobsleigh team ended with a spectacular crash on their third run. Like Eddie Edwards, the crowds warmed to their brave efforts and the unlikely heroes had their story retold in the 1993 Disney movie *Cool Runnings*.



» [Amstrad] More budget gaming excellence thanks to *Nosferatu*. An atmospheric isometric arcade adventure.

column in *Crash* magazine. Mr Brewster was hoping to release four titles a month covering all the popular formats. Unsurprisingly, much of the Micromega back catalogue, including Brewster's own creations, would be re-released under the Zeppelin banner.

With Arnold Schwarzenegger and his new movie *Predator* doing the rounds, it came as no great surprise to find that a game was ready for release. A momentary eyebrow raise occurred when it was made known that Activision had won the rights to develop a *Predator* game and not the usual tie-in specialists of US Gold and Ocean.

The game itself was a scrolling shoot-'em-up that played reasonably well and captured the feel of the movie in its four levels of tough gaming. It wasn't anything groundbreaking, although the 8-bit versions fared better in the computing press than the 16-bit efforts.

However, Activision didn't stop there, by beating all and sundry to one of the most coveted arcade coin-op licences of recent months, Sega's F-14 fighter shoot fest, *After Burner*. Activision did miss out on one top arcade title, though, by being pipped by Electric Dreams for the licence to develop home versions of Irem's *R-Type*.

Also venturing into the world of coin-op conversions for the first time was Mastertronic, which was taking on the challenge of converting *Double Dragon*. It arrived almost a year later on Mastertronic's newly acquired Melbourne House label and received a very mixed reception from the press. The C64 version stood out particularly as being one huge, indefinable, frothing monstrosity of cruddy gaming.

Computer & Video Games decided that *Rastan* (Ocean, C64) should get its Game of the Month award, leaving a multitude of *C&VG* Hit winners in its wake, namely – deep breath – *Star Wars* (Domark, Atari ST), *Match Day II* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Combat School* (Ocean, C64), *Eye* (Endurance Games, C64), *Andy Capp* (Mirrorsoft, C64), *King Of Chicago* (Mirrorsoft/Cinemaware, Amiga), *Garrison* (Rainbow Arts, Amiga), *Bad Cats* (US Gold, Amiga), *Test Drive* (Electronic Arts, Amiga), *Scruples* (Leisure Genius, Amstrad CPC), *Insanity Fight* (Microdeal, Amiga), *Tanglewood* (Microdeal, Atari ST), *Cosmic Causeway* (Gremlin Graphics, C64) and *Mean Streak* (Mirrorsoft, C64).



» [Commodore 64] Double Dragon was a travesty. Say no more.

THIS MONTH IN…

THE GAMES MACHINE



Just when you thought *The Games Machine* was a videogame magazine, it gives you a feature on board games. It reviewed a handful of new releases including Gary Lineker's Footballer Of The Year by Gremlin Board Games. Yep, Gremlin had branched out into Twister territory…



YOUR SINCLAIR



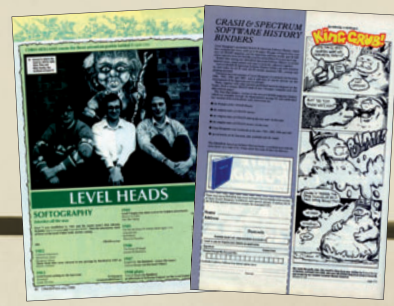
The trend for irrelevant features continued in *Your Sinclair* with Street Life, containing its top ten lists. This month it featured the chart for top ten crisps. At number one was Smith's Scampi Flavoured Fries. Why? Sniff your fingers afterwards. They're fishy but not in a good way…



CRASH



Crash interviewed the brothers behind adventure software house Level 9. Nick, Peter and Mike disliked "vomit games", hinting at *Barbarian*, but admitted that they would add blood to a boring game to "jazz it up". Elsewhere, King Grub was coughing up lemons thanks to a competition winner…



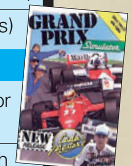
CHARTS

FEBRUARY 1988



AMSTRAD

1. Pro Ski Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
3. Joe Blade (Players)
4. World Class Leaderboard (US Gold)
5. Dizzy (Codemasters)



SPECTRUM

1. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
2. Game, Set & Match (Ocean)
3. Joe Blade (Players)
4. Solid Gold (US Gold)
5. Renegade (Imagine)



COMMODORE 64

1. Out Run (US Gold)
2. Combat School (Ocean)
3. Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
4. Solid Gold (US Gold)
5. California Games (Epyx/US Gold)

MUSIC

1. I Think We're Alone Now (Tiffany)
2. Tell It To My Heart (Taylor Dayne)
3. I Should Be So Lucky (Kylie Minogue)
4. When Will I Be Famous (Bros)
5. Get Outta My Dreams Get Into My Car (Billy Ocean)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 1992



AUGUST 1992 – Magicom to get Nintendo's back up, console Castelian, shaven prisoner haven meets Alien, old-school gaming back in the old days and Ocean goes Jurassic. Richard Burton likes T-Rex. Time to get it on and bang a gong…



» The Super Magicom device allowed backing up of cartridge games to disk. Nintendo wasn't best pleased…

The Super Nintendo had been out a matter of months but already someone had developed a 'backup' system for the machine. The Super Magicom from SN Software was a little grey box that plugged into the cartridge slot and the game cartridge was plugged directly into the Magicom. This was then connected to an external 3.5" disk drive, allowing you to back up those expensive games cartridges. Of course, when they say 'back up', they actually mean 'pirate'. Nintendo lawyers to DEFCON 2…

Things had certainly advanced since the days of a double cassette deck and stack of cheap tapes. The Magicom would set you back an eye-watering £250. Presumably most of your gaming chums wouldn't be able to afford one and therefore not have access to your 'backup' copies. So maybe it was used for backup purposes rather than piracy, after all, if only by pricing itself out of reach of the casual gamer.

August certainly seemed to be the month for third-party peripherals, with another small company called Horeleg producing the Game Key for the NES. This device allowed American cartridges to be played on your UK machine. Similar to the Magicom, it would sandwich itself between the NES cart slot and the American cartridge, allowing imported games to be played and instantly doubling the catalogue of games for your NES.



» The UK NES games collection just got bigger thanks to the Game Key, allowing US titles to function on UK machines.



» [Amiga] Videogames and dinosaurs – what's not to like?

And Nintendo's Game Boy wasn't exempt from plug-in devices, with Codemasters revealing that it was almost ready to release its Game Boy version of the Game Genie gaming cheat gadget, which gave you an edge by granting extra lives, power-ups and the like by entering codes via the on-screen Game Genie menu.

Those lucky American types were getting cheaper console gaming due to a round of pricing wars between Sega and Nintendo. The SNES had been reduced to a smidge under $100 (about £59 at the time) with Sega's Genesis falling into line shortly afterwards with a similar price of $129 (£76).

Meanwhile, in the UK we were once again being shafted, with prices of £150 and £189.99 respectively for the two systems. Some things never change…

NES and Game Boy owners finally got to see Sales Curve's latest game, *Castelian*, in which you played Binky the frog. Binky's task was to scale a series of eight towers by using the staircase spiralling around it. Of course, there were masses of nasties to contend with, and death-defying jumps and puzzle elements aplenty as you headed toward the top of each tower. A nice touch was that the tower rotated as you climbed it, thoughtfully keeping you centred on screen at all times.



» [SNES] Shoot-'em-ups don't come much better, nor, indeed, much more eccentric, than *Parodius*. A Konami masterpiece.



» [Mega Drive] *Alien 3* was a fine rendition of the movie with plenty of gut-busting and blood-letting to boot.

If that all sounds like someone has ripped off *Nebulus*, the game released by Hewson Consultants in 1987, then you would be right. It is indeed *Nebulus*, but an official conversion and not a knock-off.

It looked and played exactly the same except for one thing: the playability of both the console conversions didn't quite hit the sweet spot that the 8-bit versions did. It was let down, particularly on the NES, by some shockingly awful collision detection.

There was good news for retro gamers, particularly those back in 1992. Game Boy owners who hungered for the days of simple Atari arcade enjoyment – specifically *Missile Command*, *Asteroids* and



» [Mega Drive] *KFH* was a perfect combination of puzzle and platform elements with just a squeeze of *Lemmings*.

1992

AUGUST NEWS

12 August saw the passing of John Cage – the composer rather than the *Mortal Kombat* character – at the age of 79. Some might use the word 'composer' loosely, as Mr Cage was an avant garde musician whose most infamous composition was *4'33"*.

The controversial piece was a composition featuring a man not playing a piano. Although the butt of many jokes, it also attracted cover versions from a diverse selection of artists ranging from Frank Zappa to the BBC Symphony Orchestra.



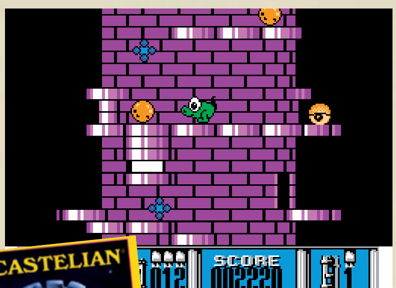
» You should have heard the extended long play version.



» In space, no one can eat ice cream… unless it's Raspberry Ripley…

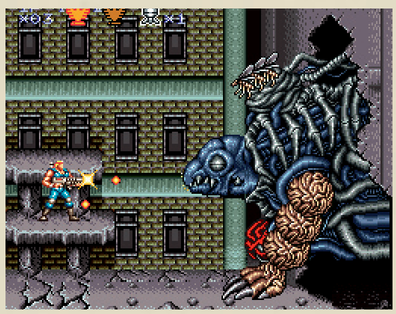
Cage always insisted that the piece was serious and that it was an insight into the sound produced by the audience and venue. Whether the shuffling of bums on seats and the occasional cough constitutes music will always be open to debate, but *4'33"* was his favourite piece and certainly opened a can of worms.

21 August saw the premiere of *Alien 3* in UK cinemas. Sigourney Weaver played Ellen Ripley, who crash lands on a remote penal colony along with an unwanted guest. Needless to say, more death and mayhem ensues, culminating in a gut-popping finale.





» [NES] Tower-scaling originality that didn't improve on the original 8-bit releases unfortunately.



» [SNES] Konami's *Contra III: Alien Wars* was a fantastic 2D run-and-gun shooter. It was known as *Super Probotector* over here.

Centipede – were in luck, as Accolade was set to release them for £19.99 each.

With the slap-headed Sigourney Weaver once more running about on the silver screen, attempting to avoid and kill big nasty aliens, the horror factor was no longer confined to the cinema as, shock horror, the first tie-in game was already completed and ready for release. Probe Software had been busy developing versions for all three Sega consoles; the Mega Drive version was due out this month, with Master System and Game Gear following shortly.

This horizontal scrolling platform shooter had you attempting to save prisoners on the isolated penal colony you had crash-landed on, followed by a rousing finale with the alien queen. Although the gameplay was exceedingly average, the graphics and atmosphere managed to lift it to a more entertaining level. Still, it sold very well, providing face-hugging fun for all the family.

Ocean Software had once again pulled off a huge licensing coup with the news that it had secured the rights to the Steven Spielberg movie based on Michael Crichton's book, *Jurassic Park*. With versions of the game planned for most home computers and games consoles, the sound of a raging T-rex and screaming raptors would be a matter of months away, along with a tidal wave of dinosaur mania.

Mean Machines reviewers had a very lean month with just two games worthy of its Mega Game status: *Parodius* (Konami, SNES) and *Krusty's Super Fun House* (Acclaim, Mega Drive).

Sega Force was a little more generous by awarding the *Sega Force* Smash to *Chuck Rock* (Virgin, Master System), *Krusty's Super Fun House* (Acclaim, Mega Drive), *The Terminator* (Virgin, Master System), *Olympic Gold* (US Gold, Game Gear), *Bart vs The Space Mutants* (Flying Edge, Mega Drive) and *Ninja Gaiden* (Sega, Master System).

The new look and hilariously unfunny *Zero* magazine/comic was persevering with its renamed award for top titles, the Mutt's Nuts. The games awarded a pair were *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* (Lucasfilm/US Gold, PC), *Sports Talk Baseball* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Super Probotector* (Konami, SNES), *Eternam* (Infogrames, PC). *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* (Lucasfilm/US Gold, Amiga), *Steel Talons* (Atari, Game Boy) and *Prince Of Persia* (Domark, Game Gear).

THIS MONTH IN...



COMMODORE FORMAT

Ever wondered how to get into the gaming business? *CF* had seven top industry people lined up for a question and answer session – it just needed its readers to send in questions for answering in a future feature, which would yield wondrous industry secrets.





MEAN MACHINES

Reviewed this month was the Japanese shoot-'em-up with added madness. *Parodius* on the SNES was high-rated as the programmers took us on a graphical trip. Dancing girls, hat-wearing eagles, puffer fish – all sorts of oddities to be blasted.





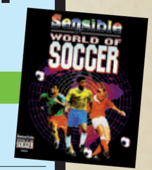
THE ONE

David Braben was in the chair discussing the exciting developments to his new game, the sequel to *Elite*. The new game promised to be much grander in scale than the original: *Elite* featured 2,000 planets, while *Elite 2* would have 100,000,000,000. Size isn't everything, though…



CHARTS

AUGUST 1992



AMIGA

1. Sensible Soccer (Renegade)
2. Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (Lucasfilm/US Gold)
3. Striker (Rage)
4. Championship Manager (Domark)
5. Epic (Ocean)



ATARI ST

1. Grand Prix (Sega)
2. Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge (Lucasfilm/US Gold)
3. RoboCop 3 (Ocean)
4. Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker (Virgin)
5. Another World (Delphine/US Gold)

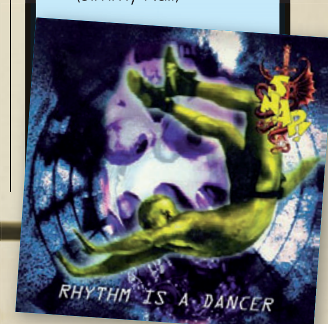


MEGA DRIVE

1. Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)
2. Kid Chameleon (Sega)
3. EA Hockey (Electronic Arts)
4. Streets Of Rage (Sega)
5. Road Rash (Electronic Arts)

MUSIC

1. Rhythm Is A Dancer (Snap!)
2. Barcelona (Freddie Mercury & Montserrat Caballe)
3. Achy Breaky Heart (Billy Ray Cyrus)
4. The Best Things In Like Are Free (Luther Vandross & Janet Jackson)
5. Ain't No Doubt (Jimmy Nail)



21

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

HARVEST MOON

JOLLY RANCHER



- » **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30+



HISTORY

Before *The Sims* came and revolutionised gaming with real-life simulation, back in 1996 the SNES had *Harvest Moon*. Taking on the role of a young farmer, you have to grow crops and livestock, and raise a family to succeed in this revolutionary but forgotten game.

Starting with virtually nothing but the bare essentials, you build your farm up by purchasing livestock to sell their produce, growing crops to sell for profit, and buying building materials to make your farm. This doesn't all happen by magic, though, so careful timekeeping and budgeting is the key to this game, and if you don't set a routine in your day, you're not going to succeed.

The game has four 30-day seasons and ever-changing weather, so consulting the weather forecast is a must to keep your farm active. During the game's calendar, celebration days take place, and trying to find a wife is a must if you want to create a thriving family. The game only has three areas, but exploring them all at different times helps to give the game more depth and make it more addictive.

It's a real shame that this game was released just towards the end of the commercial life of the SNES, because *Harvest Moon* had great gameplay, graphics and music unlike any other for the system. Original copies of the game are extremely rare, and if you own a complete copy you should treasure it. Thankfully, though, the game has been released for the Wii's Virtual Console, meaning that you may not have to fork out a small fortune to play this classic gem.

With addictive gameplay and great graphics, *Harvest Moon* is certainly a game that every RPG fan should play, and is a befitting final curtain for the Super Nintendo.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





RETROBATE PROFILE

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» **JOINED:** 3 JANUARY 2009
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» **OCCUPATION:** STUDENT
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SUPER NINTENDO



THE ULTIMATE HERO

A Complete History of Sabreman

Although Miner Willy is arguably the Spectrum's best known videogame character, Ultimate's intrepid explorer Sabreman nevertheless made his own huge impact on Sir Clive's machine. Stuart Hunt investigates the truths and myths behind Ultimate's most enduring mascot

Trying to uncover any information about the *Sabreman* series, Ultimate Play The Game, or the Stamper brothers has always proven incredibly difficult. The brothers have always been famously forward when it comes to stepping away from press attention, only giving the occasional rare interview to very lucky and select publications – most notably *Crash*, for whom the brothers had a bit of a soft spot – but giving a charmingly frank and reasonable explanation why it is that they shirk the limelight. The reason boils down to two things: the first is time – perfectly understandable, of course, seeing that for many years Tim and Chris were managing director and technical director, respectively, for one of the biggest videogame studios in Britain; and the second is that the brothers have always felt that their games should do the talking. But while the Stampers' silence is frustrating for anyone trying to glean information about their games, it was this air of mystique surrounding the company that drove the success of Ultimate and its games. And no Ultimate franchise demonstrated this thinking better than the *Sabreman* series.

In 1980, Tim Stamper, age 21, was studying physics and electronics at Loughborough University. After becoming interested in the growing advent of micro technology, he decided to quit his course and took a number of jobs working on arcade circuit boards for various firms. When Chris asked his brother one day to assist him with one of his arcade projects, Tim was immediately hooked. And with the help of Tim's girlfriend (now wife), Carol Ward, and college friend John Latchbury, the brothers decided to form the Leicestershire-based company Ashby Computers and Graphics (ACG) in the exotic-sounding town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Armed with a small team of software engineers, ACG started



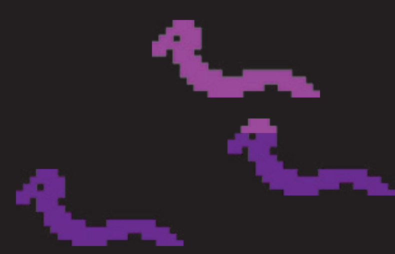






developing arcade conversion kits for license to various companies. In terms of *Sabreman*'s history, probably their most notable arcade project was the quirky 1983 title *Dingo*, which the Stampers produced in collaboration with Japanese developer Jaleco. Assuming the role of something that resembled a koala, your mission was to collect all the fruit scattered on colourful single-screen levels while avoiding things that looked like hopping pink unicorns – though it's feasible that these could be the titular dingos, as *Sabre Wulf* later showed that the Stampers weren't averse to giving enemies top billing. *Dingo* played a lot like *Pac-Man* but had visuals awash with the same intricate detail and colour that we would later associate with the tropical screens in *Sabre Wulf*.

Eventually, though, the Stampers decided that coin-ops weren't marketable and so focused their efforts on the emerging British home computer scene instead, concentrating on writing games for the Spectrum and doing so under the label Ultimate Play The Game. Like all successful videogame partnerships, Tim and Chris took on different roles to make Ultimate a success. Tim was largely responsible for the in-game graphics and packaging illustrations, while Chris, the older of the two, took on most of the coding and programming duties. Ultimate's first commercial hit came in 1983 with the release of the 16K Spectrum game *Jetpac*. This was shortly followed by the bug-zapping title *Pssst* and the seminal adventure maze smash *Atic Atac*. In a time when most home computer games were rudimentary variants of arcade titles, the trend that home computer and videogames should offer more depth and variety was first starting to happen with the release of Ultimate's early titles. The Stampers' games were sprawling arcade-style releases that couldn't be played in arcades, and they felt more epic than anything that had come before.





Rare Heroes

We take a look back at Rare's impressive portfolio of games to remember some more of its heroes

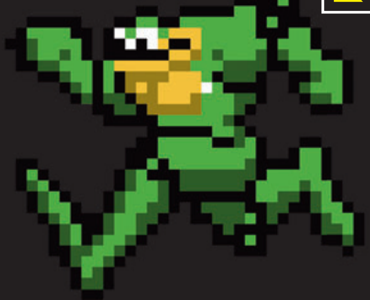


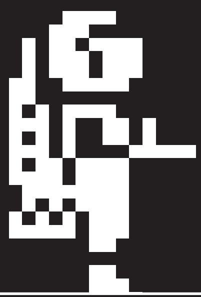
The Cast of Killer Instinct

Killer Instinct featured a roster of memorable fighters, including a semi-cameo from Sabreman himself (in wulf form). The series remains a popular 2D brawler, and Rare has teased fans with rumours of a third game for years.

Battletoads

Spawning five games, all famed for their humour, variety and insane difficulty, the Battletoads – Rash, Pimple and Zitz – proved a popular videogame rival to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and a great technical and creative showcase for Rare.





Jetman

While very little is known about the character, Jetman was Ultimate's first videogame hero and went on to become a popular gaming character on the Spectrum. His popularity eventually led to him having his own comic strip series in *Crash* magazine.



Joanna Dark

Rare performed magic once again with the sultry agent Joanna Dark. Not since the arrival of the intergalactic bounty hunter Samus Aran – and it's very likely that she had a big influence on Joanna – had gamers seen such a strong and believable leading lady.

Mr Pants

Originally a crude mascot on Rare's website, the character later received his own GBA puzzler titled *It's Mr Pants*. Originally unveiled as *Donkey Kong Coconut Crackers*, the theme had to be altered following Rare's purchase by Microsoft in 2002.





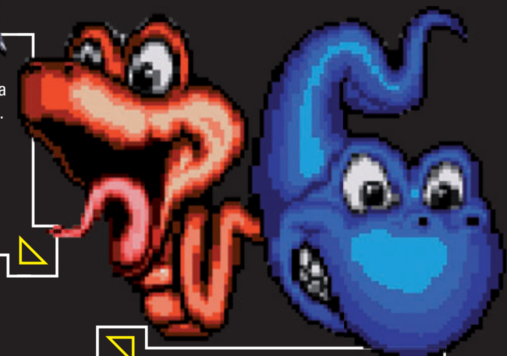
Banjo and Kazooie

After gamers were left dumbstruck by *Super Mario 64*, Rare matched Nintendo's classic platformer with one of its own. Gorgeous and massive in scope, the original *Banjo-Kazooie* created a popular videogame double act as they worked as a team to solve puzzles.

Diddy Kong

Only Rare could breathe new life into a Nintendo character with such aplomb. *Donkey Kong Country* helped put Rare on the map, bring Donkey Kong back to life, and cement Rare's relationship with Nintendo. Diddy represents an indelible footprint of that relationship.



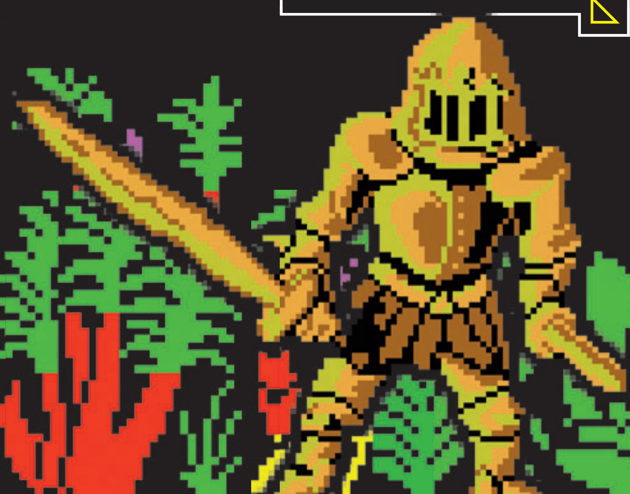


Rattle and Roll

While Rare handled the NES conversion of *Marble Madness*, it had already touched on the isometric puzzle game formula with *Bubbler*. However, it would really surpass itself with *Snake Rattle N Roll*, with its addictive gameplay and surrealist humour.

Kuros the knight

Spanning a series of four games, of which Rare only developed the first and last, *Wizards & Warriors* games were hack-and-slash adventure affairs with Rare's trademark emphasis on collecting things. In each title you assumed the role of the knight Kuros.





Jet Force Gemini

Jet Force Gemini was an epic third-person action game that borrowed elements from *Sabre Wulf, Banjo-Kazooie* and *GoldenEye*. Visually breathtaking, the game split opinion with fans, which is perhaps why Rare has yet to do anything else with the game's heroes.

Sir Arthur Pendragon

While Ultimate favoured the Spectrum, the company produced a number of Commodore 64 titles. The most well-known offerings starred this recurring adventuring aristocrat across a series of action/puzzle games.



Conker

Conker underwent a dramatic transformation for Rare's final N64 title. Originally a cutesy platform hero, Rare decided to rethink the character and turned him into a swearing antihero in an adventure that smacked a little of *Dude, Where's My Car?*.



Very quickly Ultimate positioned itself as an important and shining player in Spectrum gaming. While the company did write a number of Commodore-specific titles over the years, the Stampers chose not to handle CPC, MSX, BBC Micro and C64 conversions of their hit Spectrum games, but farm them out to third-party companies instead – most notably *Firebird*, which handled the C64 conversions of *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde*. Speaking to *The Games Machine* in March 1988, Chris Stamper explained why this was.

"I never got to know [the C64] that much. You tend to focus on one area, and I think I was a Z80 programmer to start off with, and so I adopted the Spectrum. I had no trouble with 6502 or anything like that – the Nintendo 6502 – but I was working on the Spectrum and there were other people doing the 64."

Tim, who is said to be the more business-minded of the pair, followed up with a slightly more mercantile reasoning: "We were interested in producing original games, and people wanted us to produce original product, so work for the 64 was really a job for somebody else. We could only have produced one type a year if we did all the conversions ourselves."

In 1984, the first of the four games that make up the Spectrum *Sabreman* series was released. *Sabre Wulf* was a colourful action game that introduced the world to the game's iconic pith-helmeted hero. Playing the role of a stumpy adventurer named Sabreman, your mission was to navigate through a colourful 2D tropical maze, made up of 256 flip-screens, to seek four pieces of the ancient ACG amulet – a subtle nod to Ashby Computers and Graphics – that granted him safe passage by the Keeper guarding the exit to the maze. During his mission, Sabreman had to be watchful for enemy insects and tropical animals and defeat them using his trusty sabre – or, when tackling some of the bigger foes, such as hippos and boars, by frightening them with his fencing skills. On top of this, he also had to be watchful for the titular Sabre Wulf, an invincible enemy that appeared in certain areas of the maze, and had to be careful not to get caught dawdling either as a deadly sentient fire would flash up to usher him on his way. *Sabre Wulf* was essentially an interactive maze, but one brimming with intricate detail, gobsmacking colour and some satisfying hack-and-slash combat – although the fact that Sabreman couldn't attack enemies above and beneath him was a bit problematic. Look beneath its bright shrubbery and there were also some subtle arcade accents to be found, likely influenced by the Stampers' arcade past. The game was two-player – though only in the Speccy and C64 versions and not at the same time – and its display had a clear and clean arcade feel to its layout. The game was full-screen with no intrusive object screens or inventory panels to encroach on your peripheral vision, with the high score tallies positioned at the top corners of the screen.

Sabre Wulf was the first Ultimate title to be adorned with the iconic Ultimate Play The Game frame packaging, and to also ditch the traditional £5.50 price point and retail at £9.95. In an interview with *Crash*, Tim revealed why it was that they took the gamble to increase *Sabre Wulf*'s price.

"We were having a severe problem with the number of [illegal] copies. And I think going from £5.50 to £9.95 was a bold step we took. The price was gradually creeping up, and I thought we might go the whole way and put the product out at a price that was realistic for the time involved in creating it. We were trying to create an incentive for the person who paid £9.95 to say, 'Hey, you're not copying my game!'"

The strategy worked. *Sabre Wulf* smashed all sales records for Ultimate, and even surpassed Activision's monster smash *Ghostbusters*. More importantly, though, Chris and Tim had succeeded in coming up with a classic and

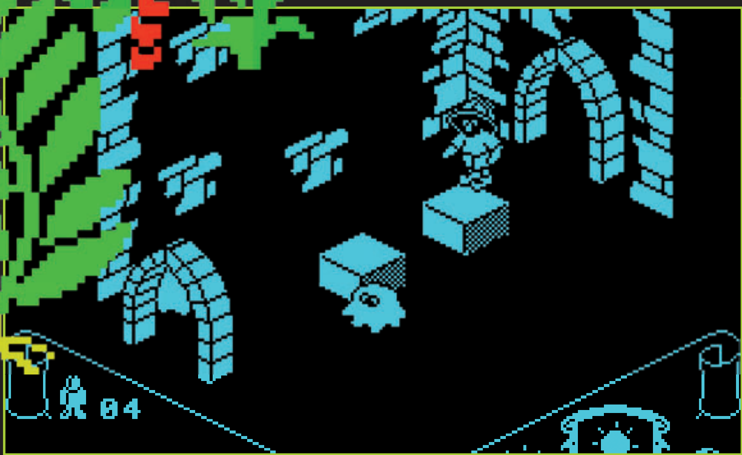


» [Spectrum] Some reviewers criticised *Sabre Wulf* for simply being *Atic Atac* in wulf's clothing.

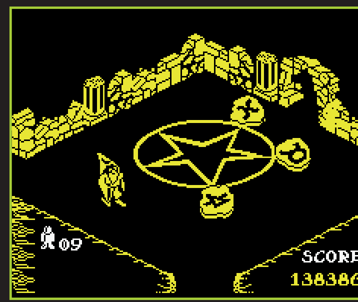


» [Spectrum] *Knight Lore* single-handedly revolutionised microcomputer gaming.





» [BBC] To help keep the character fresh, Ultimate tweaked the look of Sabreman during the series.



» [Spectrum] *Pentagram* had Sabreman drop the adventure threads for a Gandalf fancy dress costume.



» [C64] To escape the maze of *Sabre Wulf*, players had to find four parts of an ancient amulet.

lasting videogame hero in Sabreman. Boasting a memorable name and quirky look, thanks to his sword and pith helmet, Sabreman not only slotted perfectly into the archetypal mould of the 8-bit videogame hero – essentially an everyman character with a large nose and a hat – but the character's clean and chunky design also partnered brilliantly with the technical limitations of the Spectrum.

But despite its popularity and commercial success, there was one criticism that some reviewers levelled at *Sabre Wulf*. Many argued that it was too similar to the Stampers' previous smash *Atic Atac*. Despite the improvement in visuals and the tweak in perspective, some felt that the game borrowed heavily from *Atic Atac*'s maze layout and criticised the Stampers for not pushing the envelope quite as far as they had with their previous titles. With that in mind, it's no surprise that, for the next game in the series, the Stampers took a slightly different approach to the game. *Underwurlde* featured a brand new side-on perspective, which gave the game an almost platform game appearance. The gameplay also adhered to this platformer-style approach, with a fidgety-feeling Sabreman spelunking and jumping through the game's castle and deep through its underground caverns. While the viewpoint and gameplay were once again tweaked, *Underwurlde* still retained Ultimate's signature flip-screen design, this time across a colossal 597 screens, making for another sprawling adventure. Perhaps the biggest change that the Stampers introduced with *Underwurlde* was disallowing enemies from directly killing or causing damage to Sabreman. Instead, they could only harm him by pushing him to his death. The story found Sabreman trapped in the cavernous Underwurlde. Without his trusty sword for protection, Sabreman had to defeat one of three guardians blocking his escape by finding three weapons – a knife, dagger and torch – hidden in the caves. It was your job to help Sabreman find and use the right weapon against the corresponding demon guarding one of the exits. With three possible exits in the game, *Underwurlde* had three different endings and each end sequence led the player onto the path of the next three games that were planned for the *Sabreman* series.

While Sandy White pipped the Stampers to the post by

"Chris and Tim succeeded in coming up with a classic and lasting videogame hero"

releasing the first 3D isometric game on the Spectrum with *Ant Attack*, Ultimate's astonishing *Knight Lore*, the third title in the *Sabreman* saga, blew away all competition. Nothing previously released on the Spectrum came close to touching *Knight Lore* on a graphical or technical level. Set inside the exquisitely detailed rooms of Melkhior's castle and running from Ultimate's impressive Filmation engine, *Knight Lore* oozed atmosphere and quality from every pixel. But it wasn't just the groundbreaking visuals and cartoon look that impressed and amazed fans; a couple of interesting changes had occurred in Sabreman too. Fully realised in 3D, and with only his eyeballs and big round nose visible from underneath his pith helmet, this more cartoon Sabreman was perfectly suited to the game's astonishing new design style. And that wasn't all, as after being bitten by the Sabre Wulf, Sabreman is left battling with lycanthropy, transforming him into a werewolf at nightfall. The game's premise found the adventurer searching the wizard's castle for the items needed to rid him of his lupine state. With a time limit of 40 days and nights to complete his mission, which dries up pretty quickly in the game world, timing and planning was needed to solve the tricky action-based puzzles and glean the required ingredients. The innovative Filmation engine also allowed Sabreman to interact with objects in the game, adding a real sense of freedom to the game and its puzzles; something never really seen before on the Spectrum. Ultimate also ensured that Sabreman's lycanthropy formed an integral part of the gameplay. In his wulf state, Sabreman could leap higher to solve puzzles that would otherwise be impossible, but was more vulnerable to particular types of enemy. But perhaps the most shocking thing about *Knight Lore* was its timing. Speaking to *Crash*, the Stampers later made the startling revelation that *Knight Lore* was written before *Sabre Wulf* was even finished. The brothers had admitted to purposely holding back the game's release for fear that no one would buy *Sabre Wulf* after seeing the new engine in action.



"*Knight Lore* was finished before *Sabre Wulf*," said Tim, speaking to *Crash*, "but we decided that the market wasn't ready for it. Because if we released *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* – which was already half-finished – we wouldn't have sold *Sabre Wulf*. So we sold *Sabre Wulf*, which was a colossal success, and then released the other two. There was a little bit of careful planning in there. But they could have had *Knight Lore* possibly a year earlier – we just had to sit on it because everyone else was so far behind."

Given the popularity of the Filmation engine, and the fact that a number

of software houses and programmers quickly set about trying to capitalise on its popularity, the Stampers saw no reason not to do the same, and so released more Filmation titles over the coming years including *Alien 8* (1985), *Nightshade* (1985) and later *Gunfright* (1986). It was also around this time that the Stampers set up a sister company to Ultimate named Rare Designs of the Future, which they later curtailed to the far snappier name of Rare. It transpired that as far back as 1983, while busy writing *Jetpac*, the Stampers had kept a watchful eye on the emerging Japanese videogame market, and had been secretly getting to grips with programming for Nintendo's Famicom console. The Stampers had once again predicted another big shift that was about to occur in the British game market. The thinking behind this new enterprise was that while Ultimate would handle the brothers' microcomputer output, all Nintendo and console releases would fall to Rare. This turned out to be a savvy move by the brothers, because by 1986, around the release of *Gunfright*, reviewers were expressing concerns about Ultimate's dependence on its Filmation engine. Eventually, realising that there was nowhere else they could take the Spectrum, and that it wasn't beneficial to company expansion to continue producing games on the machine, Tim and Chris decided to sell part of Ultimate to US Gold, remaining majority shareholders in the company, and turn their attentions to Rare and breaking the console market.

Because its release fell after US Gold's part-acquisition of Ultimate, there has always been doubt over the true authors of the next game in the *Sabreman* series. *Pentagram*'s story found Sabreman on a mission to locate the titular star-shaped artefact. To complete his mission, he had to fix five broken obelisks using magically charged well water and then collect five pieces of stone to make up the magical relic. After curing him of his lycanthropy, Sabreman befriends the magician Melkhior and chooses to become his apprentice. Now a wizard, *Pentagram* marked the first time in the series that Sabreman ditched his adventuring gear, opting to wear a wizard robe and grow a beard instead.

Given that *Pentagram* didn't quite match up to the splendour of previous *Sabreman* games, and that, in another interview with *Crash*, Chris named *Gunfright* as the final game that the brothers had worked on together, its believed that *Pentagram* was either written by Tim or Chris alone, or by a team of US Gold programmers. Confusing matters further, of course, is the fact that the brothers had a history



The Ultimate Filmation Games

Ultimate's engine powered some of the most visually impressive Spectrum games and set the company on its future path of technical innovation

Alien 8 1984

Essentially *Knight Lore* set in outer space, the Stampers' second Filmation title saw players control a square-looking maintenance droid whose mission is to keep alive the sleeping crew of a spaceship by finding the missing components needed to fix the ship's cryogenic life support machine. While its formula is similar to *Knight Lore*, the sci-fi theme feels unique enough to make it a classic in its own right. The Stampers later revealed that it was well into development before the release of *Sabre Wulf*.





Nightshade 1985

Often mistaken as an episode in the *Sabreman* series, *Nightshade* was, in fact, a standalone adventure game. Essentially a mixture of *Underwurlde* and *Knight Lore*, but using scrolling screens as opposed to static ones, you played an adventurer who must rid a village of evil by vanquishing four demons. Not a patch on *Knight Lore*, and in fact quite inferior in many ways, this was the first time that voices of dissent were really starting to be heard from Ultimate fans.

Gunfright 1986

Whereas *Alien 8* launched Filmation into space, *Gunfright* shifted the engine to the Wild West. Playing the role of a town sheriff, who looks remarkably like Sabreman – possibly an ancestor – your mission was to clean up a town riddled with outlaws. Split into three stages, the first saw you practising your aim by shooting money bags, the second saw players patrolling the streets to find and capture nine wanted fugitives, and the final one finished in a dramatic gunfight.

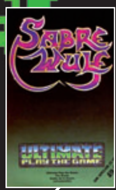




Bubbler 1987

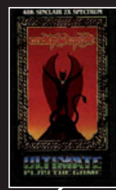
The most technically advanced of all the Filmation titles, this sought-after Speccy and Amstrad title has fetched some astonishing prices on eBay and was the second game of the three post-Stamper Ultimate games. *Bubbler* was essentially a Filmation take on titles such as *Spindizzy* and *Marble Madness*. It finds the player transformed into a globule of slime by an evil wizard, and trying to cure this gluey state by corking bottles of magic to weaken his oppressor.

Sabreman Timeline



Sabre Wulf
The first *Sabreman* title was a 2D flip-screen adventure. It found pith-helmeted hero Sabreman trying to find pieces of an ancient amulet and escape the titular Sabre Wulf.

1984



Underwurlde
A new direction and new perspective for Sabreman saw him jumping around the dank cavernous world of Underwurlde in an enjoyable side-scrolling 2D platformer.

1984



Knight Lore
It was the game that changed the face of Spectrum gaming forever. This pioneering isometric 3D adventure smash saw Sabreman trying to cure himself of lycanthropy after being bitten by the Sabre Wulf.

1984

of not releasing games in order of their completion – remember that they had previously held back the release of *Knight Lore* – so it's also feasible that *Pentagram* was written, or at least partially written, by the brothers collectively before *Gunfright* was even released. Regardless of who the true author of *Pentagram* is, it would be Ultimate's final *Sabreman* release, and the most ambitious of its Filmation games.

The true casualty of US Gold's partial buyout of Ultimate was the final unreleased episode in the *Sabreman* saga: *Mire Mare*. The much talked about final episode in the series, despite being mentioned in the endings of *Pentagram* and *Underwurlde*, never actually found a release. Only the Stampers know the truth, but that hasn't stopped various conspiracy theories from surfacing on the internet, and a conveniently anonymous former Ultimate staffer claiming that the game was finished. While entirely speculative, it's rumoured

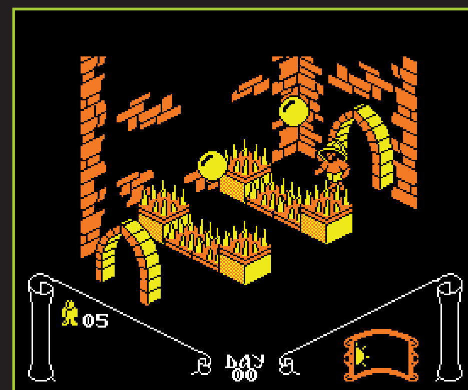
> **"That he has continued to crop up is proof that Rare has a lot of fondness for Sabreman"**

that development of *Mire Mare* was held back by Ultimate during US Gold's partial takeover to ensure that it was its final release. But it's believed that the Stampers grew disillusioned with US Gold after learning of the company's strategy to focus on budget re-releases over investment in new titles, and as a result the game was never finished. While many fans have assumed that *Mire Mare* would keep the Filmation look of both *Knight Lore* and *Pentagram*, in 1990 it was revealed on Rare's website that the game would have played more like *Sabre Wulf*. The website also claimed that the basic game design of *Mire Mare* was finalised, but coding never commenced because of time. In hindsight, it's very unlikely that the game was finished. Knowing just how popular the series was with Spectrum owners, it's improbable that the Stampers would have blocked the release of the final game, regardless of any ill feeling between them and US Gold at the time. It's far more likely that the series was a victim of timing. As the brothers had rightly predicted, the market was changing as the reign of the microcomputer was coming to an end.

It would be 19 years before we would finally see Sabreman return to our screens in his own game. Before then, of course, the character had made a number of subtle cameo appearances in various Rare games, fuelling the belief that another *Sabreman* game was on the cards. He was the main inspiration behind the character Count Von Sabrewulf in *Killer Instinct*, and also had a minor cameo in *Banjo-Tooie*, where he appeared frozen inside a block of ice on the stage Hailfire Peaks. Rare has also made reference to Sabreman in the games *Viva Piñata* and in the GBA version of *Donkey Kong Country*, and at one time was even rumoured to be working on a racing game based on the *Sabreman* universe. Titled *Sabreman Stampede*, it was speculated that the game would have been adapted from the cancelled *Donkey Kong Racing* GameCube game. In 2004, Rare finally decided to revisit the character properly by giving him his own game. And once again it saw another change in the look and gameplay style of the series. Released for the GBA, and confusingly titled *Sabre Wulf*, the game wasn't a portable remake as many fans assumed but more of a cutesy



» [Spectrum] To this day there is still uncertainty over the true authorship of *Pentagram*.



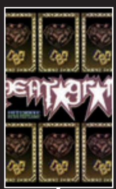
» [Amstrad] The Stampers later revealed that *Knight Lore* was written before the release of *Sabre Wulf*.



» [GBA] *Sabre Wulf*'s colourful cartoon look polarised fans, but we loved all the referances to past games.



» [Arcade] *Dingo* was a colourful-looking arcade title by ACG that has a spookily similar look to *Sabre Wulf*.



Pentagram

Sabreman ditched the helmet and shorts for a wizard getup in his fourth and final Spectrum outing. This time he was on a mission to find the scattered pieces of a magical artefact known as the Pentagram.



Mire Mare
(Unreleased)

Little is known about the planned but unreleased final chapter in the saga, though it's been rumoured that the game would have played more like *Sabre Wulf*.

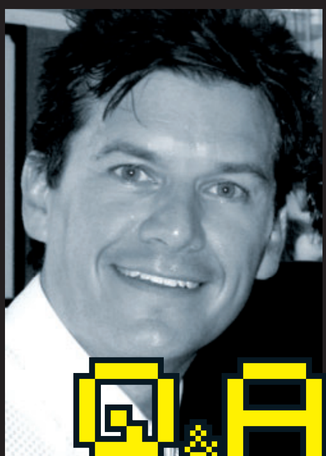


Sabre Wulf (GBA)

The last game to star Sabreman saw him don his pith helmet once again for a colourful side-scrolling platform game that shared a few similarities with Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* series.

1985

2004



Q&A

We probe Rare's head of studio, Mark Betteridge, about those burning Sabreman questions

■ Did the Stampers ever tell you where the idea for Sabreman originated?
Sadly no. Maybe the result of watching *Carry On Up The Khyber* too many times? Sabreman was designed to make sure the player knew they were in the hands of an experienced, intrepid explorer before dropping them into the middle of the jungle or at the entrance to an ancient castle. It was probably a bonus that he was a quintessentially British character on a quintessentially British computer.

■ Why do you think he proved so popular on the Spectrum?
I suppose a lot of it was down to the games themselves making such an impact, and Sabreman being a representative for them. He was the common thread that ran through the whole series, and the way his characteristics changed between the games – explorer, werewolf, wizard – kept him interesting.

■ Could you tell us everything you know about *Mire Mare*?
Well, there was cover art, which we posted on the Rare website when it was plucked out of Tim's original artwork portfolio back in the late Nineties. I don't think the game itself ever got very far; it certainly wasn't completed. There was every intention of finishing and releasing it, but Ultimate's time on the 8-bit home computers turned out to be limited before it morphed into Rare and changed direction.

■ Why was *Sabre Wulf* resurrected for the Game Boy Advance as opposed to a home console?
The team just wanted to do something with one of the old Ultimate properties, and handhelds seemed like a good place to experiment with the popularity and relevance of past franchises. The style ended up being very different, but *Sabre Wulf* on the GBA turned out really well, as did *Jetpac Refuelled* on Xbox Live Arcade later. We like to revisit the old IP from time to time, but with over 25 years of characters and series to work with and the constant need for new titles on top of that, we can never make everything that we want to!

■ Whose idea was it to stick him in *Banjo-Tooie* and was there any truth to the rumours of a proposed N64 game?
That was lead designer Gregg Mayles. The *Banjo* team are known for including self-referential bits and pieces, from the posters in *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* to the game discs in *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*. In *Tooie*'s case, Gregg needed a character that had been frozen in ice for years and he wanted it to be someone recognisable, so he went all the way back through Rare's history to Sabreman. There were no N64 *Sabreman* games proposed – *Tooie* was his only appearance on the system.

■ Tell us a little about *Sabreman Stampede* on the Xbox.
It was conceived as a sort of Xbox successor to the similarly unreleased *Donkey Kong Racing* template featuring jungle animals instead of vehicles, but it soon evolved into something more adventure-based, which better suited the character. One of the senior team members recently described it as "like *Jambo Safari* and *Grand Theft Auto* rolled into one". Make of that what you will!



» [GBA] Some 19 years later and Sabreman is still being hounded by his old nemesis.

reboot of the series. A side-scrolling platform romp that shared a number of similarities to Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* titles – most notably that many of the missions required Sabreman to enlist the help of various jungle creatures – it saw Sabreman travelling to a variety of villages, all taking their names from Ultimate games, to solve the puzzles required to enter Sabre Wulf's various lairs. While Sabreman had taken the platform game route once before with *Underwurlde*, the epic and mature feel that the series is renowned for was lost among the cute and colourful aesthetics of this portable outing, and left many fans disappointed and confused as to what Rare has in store for the character.

Whatever the future holds for Sabreman, it's clear that the character still features prominently in Rare's impressive catalogue. The very fact that the character has continued to crop up in various Rare titles over the years is unmitigated proof that the company obviously holds a lot of adoration and fondness for the character. And while many passionate retro fans would be happy for Sabreman's adventures to continue on for many years to come, we can understand Rare's want to use the character sparingly. In terms of quality, the worst thing Sonic ever did was become a household name. The popularity of Sega's zippy mascot is a contributing factor to why he quickly got enveloped by annoying peripheral characters and silly gameplay gimmicks as Sega tried to capitalise on his popularity. Even Mario, unarguably the most popular videogame character in history, has been lent out to projects less befitting of his stature over the years. Can the same really be said about Sabreman? While his 2004 return might not have been quite what fans had in mind for their hero, the GBA title was still an enjoyable and quirky platform adventure, and has done nothing to tarnish the heritage of the character. It's just a shame that, in 2007, the Stampers left Rare, as unless they plan on making a triumphant return to the games industry any time soon, it's looking increasingly unlikely that we will ever get to hear the definitive story behind the *Sabreman* series, that US Gold relationship and what actually happened to *Mire Mare*. One thing is certain, though: if we are fortunate enough to ever find out the truth, you'll be the first to know.

RETRO SHAMER

» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

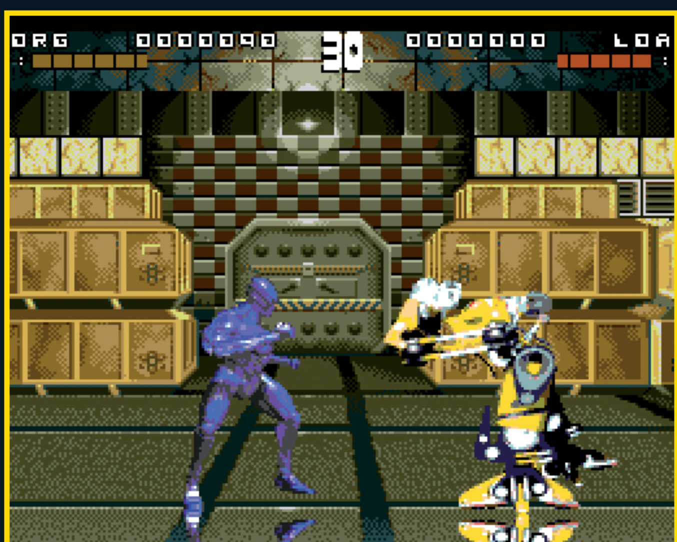


» [PC] If you want the definitive *Rise Of The Robots*, we recommend the PC version. Want the worst version? Any will do.

GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHER:** MIRAGE
- » **GENRE:** 2D FIGHTER



» [Mega Drive] *Rise Of The Robots* was responsible for generating one of the largest hype machines in gaming history. In hindsight, perhaps it should have been the game's final boss.

While most bad games fade discreetly into obscurity, staying memorable to only a small number of people who have been burned by their badness first-hand, there are others that, usually due to them being surrounded by a huge bubble of hype and anticipation, everyone and their grandmother knows to avoid. *Rise Of The Robots* is one such game.

As you might expect from a title that many regard as the worst game in the world, the problem with *Rise Of The Robots* is pretty much everything. Just the very idea of pitting robots against one another in a game genre that must feel fluid, fast, responsive, and have controls and collision detection that you could set your watch by is utterly absurd. None of these things really pop into your head whenever you think of robots, do they? Things that are essentially just slow, lumbering, heavy, sluggish, shapeless hunks of steel and components built to do singular and menial tasks like lifting hunks of iron or sticking wing mirrors onto Volvos. So can we really be surprised that the game plays like a heavy, sluggish robot and that its fighters share three moves between them?

The biggest issue with the game is its laughably broken gameplay. Fighting is not enjoyable in the slightest because the moves feel the same, you cannot jump over your opponents, and there seems to be this curious air of randomness that envelops how the game determines battle damage; a punch that has just sapped half your opponent's energy may only chip away a tiny sliver a few second later. *Kung Fu Master*, released ten years before *Rise Of The Robots*, actually has a far more sophisticated combat system, and that's surprising when you consider that on the run-up to *Rise Of The Robots*' release, it was being hailed as a watershed game, owing to the pioneering features that it was said to be bringing to the genre. As well as its state-of-the-art graphics, Brian May soundtrack, and having the first morphing videogame character – the final boss, the Supervisor – it was said to utilise a unique intelligent combat system that adapted to your style of play. While the first three features are certainly present and accounted for, we actually struggled to find the last one, but this was because all the matches we played ended up becoming the videogame equivalent of Hungry Hippos, with us frantically mashing our control pad into a sweaty and puffy mess until the game told us to stop.

If there's any modicum of goodness to be found in *Rise Of The Robots*, it's the cyberpunk visuals and creative robot character designs. But Mirage even managed to mess up in that area too. While the game features some pretty decent-looking robot fighters, the character that you get to control in the game looks like a blue naked man. This means that everyone you get to fight looks far cooler than you. And the game never allows you to escape from this fact because, even in multiplayer, either you or a friend is always forced to fight as the game's naked-looking hero.

Why *Robots* is a Retro Shamer should hit you within seconds of your first fight. The game was a classic case of badly broken gameplay simply trying to survive in the real world on looks alone. And to be honest, even those once-impressive visuals are looking more than a little rusty these days.

A WORD FROM THE HERO

"I'd just like to add something that I've been dying to get off my blue man boobs: you ignorant humans all missed the point about *Rise Of The Robots*. It's supposed to play like a photocopier – we are robots, after all. If you want fluidity, great gameplay and impressive action then buy *Street Fighter II*; if you want a realistic and accurate fighting game about robots, then here it is."

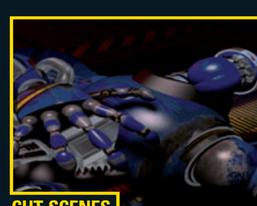


» THE POINTLESS PARTS:



THE SUPERVISOR

Inspired by the T-1000 in *Terminator 2*, *Rise Of The Robots* made a big song and dance about featuring a morphing character.



CUT-SCENES

The visuals were impressive, as this shot demonstrates. Shame the gameplay and ropey animation did them a disservice.



PORTS

Rise Of The Robots was squeezed onto the Game Boy and Master System. The same broken gameplay with graphics to match.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

TWO CRUDE DUDES

- » **SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHER:** DATA EAST
- » **DEVELOPER:** OPERA HOUSE



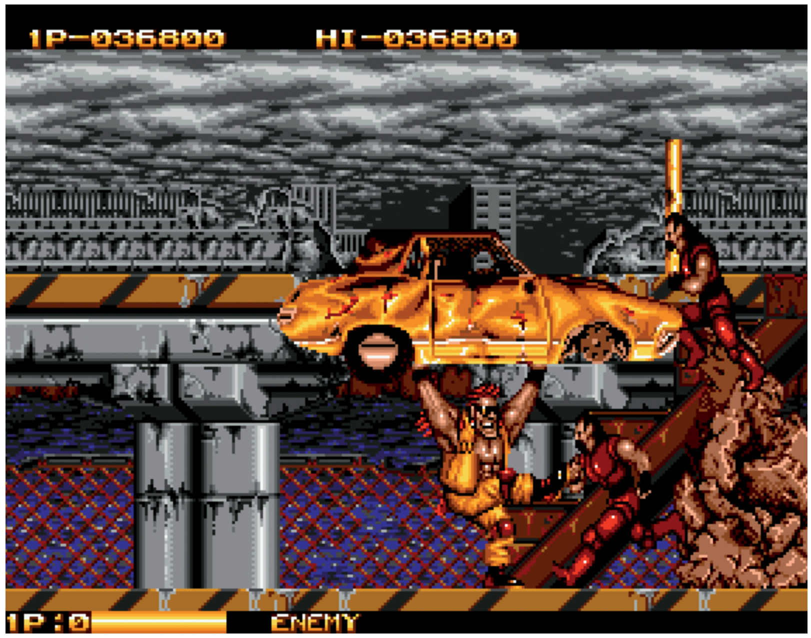
You've got to love the lunacy of some videogame plotlines. Some are so wafer thin that supermodels have been known to use them as girth targets, whereas others are so ridiculously absurd that they seem over the top even inside the most cheese-and-port-fuelled dreams. Take Data East's marvellous smash-'em-up *Two Crude Dudes* (aka *Crude Buster*), for example: a game that ticks both of these boxes with a rather loud head butt.

The plot of *Two Crude Dudes* is your typical beat-'em-up tale. The year is 2010 AD, and various nuclear explosions of unknown origin start happening in New York City, transforming the Big Apple into a smouldering ruin. Flash forward 20 years and the government has decided to attempt to rebuild New York but finds that its plans are stilted by a violent gang called Big Valley, which is using technology and biological weaponry to take what's left of the city as its own. The government decides to do what any rational administration would do: enlist the help of two abnormally large mercenaries who dress like punk rockers to enter the ruins and put a stop to the gang.

Anyway, within six seconds of play you realise that none of that is important. The real brilliance of *Two Crude Dudes* comes from the playing. It's unabashedly the meat-headed lug of the beat-'em-up genre. It's a dumb yet satisfying smash-and-grab mission guaranteed to slap a huge smile over your chops, especially if you're playing it with a friend.

The big gimmick about *Two Crude Dudes* is that everything that looks like it can be picked up and used as a weapon probably can. Lamp posts, rocks, traffic lights, cars, enemies, bosses, tanks, each other when playing in two-player… Basically anything that isn't floor, building or sky can be lifted up and used against your enemies. This gives this fantastic destructive feel to the game. There's even a destructive element to replenishing your energy, with our heroes smashing cans of power-replenishing cola from vending machines scattered throughout the game. These cola machines incidentally also serve as a fantastic *Street Fighter II*-style bonus round between the levels.

As well as the wanton destruction, the other notable aspect about *Two Crude Dudes* is the sheer variety of enemies. There is an insane number of quirky and imaginative bad guys to tackle, and the action doesn't let up. One minute you're fighting a guy who looks like Jake 'The Snake' Roberts; the next you're taking on a demonic-looking Father Christmas before wrestling a couple of tanks. There's just this wonderful chunky feel to everything about the game, and the Mega Drive port is remarkably faithful to the arcade original and can be picked up for a few quid. If you're looking for a great brawler for the Mega Drive that will set you back the same price as a six-pack of Power Cola, then look no further than *Two Crude Dudes*. It's the silliest but easily most satisfying slugger on Sega's superlative 16-bit system.



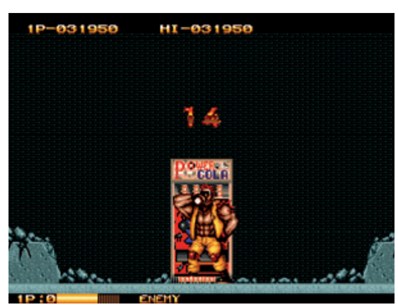
» [Mega Drive] If it isn't bolted down, chances are you can use it as a weapon. Actually, even if it is bolted down, you can usually use it.



» [Mega Drive] The game features a varied assortment of enemies, like this familiar-looking wrestler.



» [Mega Drive] The action comes into its own in multiplayer.



» [Mega Drive] We don't condone vandalism.

THE MAKING OF...



Return Fire's quirky mix of militaristic action, strategy and humour made it one of the few true classics on the ill-fated 3DO system. Mike Bevan discusses operational tactics with designer Reichart Von Wolfsheild

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** PROLIFIC PUBLISHING
- **» DEVELOPER:** SILENT SOFTWARE
- **» PLATFORM:** 3DO, PC, PSONE, SEGA SATURN
- **» RELEASED:** 1995
- **» GENRE:** REAL-TIME ACTION/STRATEGY
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10
- **» BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FIREPOWER, TURBO, DIE HARD



If, like us, you've ever looked at *Return Fire*'s packaging and wondered, Baron RK Von Wolfsheild is indeed a real baron. "My father is a baron, my mother is a baroness. My father is from Northern Europe, of Slavic ancestry. 'Wolfsheild' means the 'Wolf Wall' that blocked the invading Teutonics from Germany." Despite the aura of nobility, the creator of one of the most enjoyable two-player games of the Nineties talks rapidly and enthusiastically with a pronounced West Coast accent. Born in London, Reichart moved to the US with his family when he was eight years old, eventually settling in Los Angeles.

A precociously intelligent child, he was enrolled in a class for gifted students, and driven by his quintessentially hippy-like teacher – "Long black beard and hair. He looked like Steve Wozniak." – to take a further interest in technology. "I ended up leaving school at a very young age: 13. It was a combination of me leaving and them asking me to leave, because I was a little bit problematic to adults at the time…"

"My parents were of the mind that they knew that I was able to do whatever I wanted to do, and didn't really fight it," he remembers. "I spent my time reading, non-stop, day in day out. There were piles of books from floor to ceiling with markers and notes – math, physics, hardware and software. I built my first computer when I was a teenager. I built the chips from scratch out of transistors, so hardware was my real background."

Working as an art director for television commercials and videos, Reichart continued to dabble with technology in his spare time. He designed a computer program to reliably transfer film stock to video tape and sold it to both Paramount and Warner Bros. He made an aborted foray into space telecommunications for the US government. And he began working as a contract programmer for Epyx "just for fun".

Reichart's passion for computers led him to start an early Commodore 64 user group in Los Angeles. "We'd crack Brøderbund or Electronic Arts and compress their stuff down so we could pass them around," he admits. "We usually owned all the software, but we just didn't like the idea that if we ever lost

data we'd have to go back to the company to get hold of it."

Although the idea of designing his own games hadn't previously appealed, a chance event at this time sparked his imagination. "I was in an arcade playing a videogame with a friend, and I was basically complaining, 'This is a piece of crap. Who designs this stuff?' He said, 'Well, if you think you could do a better job, go do it!' I said, 'Oh, it's easy to make a videogame. Ten times easier than the type of stuff I usually work on.' So I made a one dollar bet with him, and that was how I got interested."

"I had been playing with the Amiga and was stunned by it," he continues. "I wanted to do something that had never been done before: build an arcade game that played over a 300-baud modem and let you type and talk to each other and play at the same time. The fact is, I didn't want to play with a computer; I wanted to play a human. I loved the idea of a computer offering a simulation or environment for us to express ourselves, and that a game could be better when you weren't in the same room as the person you were playing against."

Reichart called on one of his 'hacker' friends, Will Ware, for assistance: "We began to work together, building a game called *Firepower* for the Amiga." *Firepower*'s concept was simple: two players battled to capture their opponent's hidden flag and return it to their base. Players chose to do battle with three different military vehicles: a light tank (the Scorpion); a slower, better armoured tank (the Mark XJ1); or a mine-laying support vehicle (the Shadow).

The 'capture the flag' concept, though familiar to today's gamers in a multitude of multiplayer first-person shooters, was fairly new at the time, and sprang from Reichart's Old World family upbringing.

"I wanted to get the concept across instantly, " he explains, "and a flag is a symbolic representation – it's not about the flag itself. I grew up at a time when the discussion of military tactics and war was a common conversation at my family table, and the stories always seemed to come down to having limited resources and the symbolic concept of a 'flag'. Many years later Eddie Izzard did a skit about the British Empire that sums up the idea perfectly: 'Why do you get to win?' 'Well we have a flag. England has a flag, and that's why we won.'

"One game that influenced me was *Raid On Bungeling Bay* – I wanted that as a two-player game. In fact, our eventual goal, which we did in *Return Fire 2*, was putting the jets and boats in. Will Wright's game had one very subtle thing: when you pulled back on the stick and pressed the button, the helicopter would slow down and drop a bomb, and we integrated that into *Firepower* in the way the Shadow laid its mines. We thought the idea that the only time you could lay mines was when you were backing up was a really interesting concept; the fact that you were in danger of blowing yourself up. It put you in fear of your own weapon…"

"All of the tanks in *Firepower* are digitised versions of tanks I owned in my childhood as Dinky toys," reveals Reichart. Its crisp, bas-relief shaded visuals were a world away from those in that primitive arcade game, a modified version of *Tank* by Jay Miner, former Atari employee and creator of the Amiga. "The reason it was so bad turned out to be not the game itself but the fact that someone had taken an Atari computer and put it into an arcade cabinet," Reichart continues. "Many years later, I met Jay, and he said to me, '*Firepower*: good game… You copied me well!'"

Firepower was well received, becoming the first in a trio of split-screen/modem-playable titles marketed as the 'One to One Series' by Reichart's newly formed company, Silent Software. "We got a lot of positive letters from women saying 'I kicked my husband's ass in this game'," laughs Reichart. "Although it looks like a war game, *Firepower* is a skill game; we thought of it as a real-time strategy game



> "I said, 'Oh, it's easy to make a videogame. Ten times easier than the type of stuff I usually work on'" A STAR IS BORN OR FAMOUS LAST WORDS?





» The Shadow support vehicle in the original *Firepower*, which morphed into *Return Fire*'s missile launcher. It was originally digitised from this Dinky toy model of a vehicle featured in the Gerry Anderson TV series *UFO*.

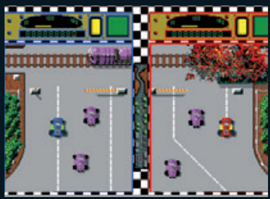
ONE TO ONE SERIES

SILENT SOFTWARE'S TRILOGY of inventive two-player games is still worth tracking down today…



FIREPOWER (1987)

The predecessor to *Return Fire* is an excellent game in itself as you battle hostile choppers, gun emplacements and your wily opponent to rescue POWs and nick the all-important winning flag of peace… or something.



TURBO (1988)

Great fun. This fast-paced split-screen racer has you blasting through city streets mow… uh, avoiding pedestrians and numerous level crossings, accompanied by *Burnout*-level scenes of mass destruction.



GALACTIC INVASION (1988)

An ambitious concept, *Galactic Invasion* is a cross between *Firepower* and *Star Control*, pitching two competing player-controlled galaxies against each other. Unfortunately, the game's rushed development shows.

RETURN FIRE





» [PlayStation] Grabbing a chopper and strafing the enemy base to the strains of *Ride Of The Valkyries* is one of life's simple pleasures.

RETURN FIRE 2

ALTHOUGH THIS PC-ONLY sequel was less successful than its predecessor, it's a fascinating update, adding two new vehicles – the jet and PT boat – and accommodating up to 16 players. "*Return Fire 2* is, in my opinion, a truly great game," says Reichart. "It was a huge 3D world with incredible detail of graphics for the time. It was the first game to really use Microsoft's force feedback joystick. When a missile hits you it hits you in three dimensions. If you're behind me and shooting I can feel it going slightly to the left or the right, so I know where you are viscerally. But because of the problems with video cards back then it was difficult to get running."

Jim Sachs, Silent Software employee and former military pilot, was brought in to help refine the new jet units, as Reichart explains: "We were fine-tuning the game, and this guy comes and stands and plays the game and barely moves. And Jim completely kicks our sorry asses. And we're all just staring at him saying, 'How the hell did you do that?' He said: 'Well you guys built enough controls in here, this is pretty realistic, these are standard operations we used to do.' What he was doing was manoeuvring so he'd get two people in his sights while the rest of us were just trying to get one, which sounds common sense but isn't really natural to a non-pilot. So we used Jim's skill and knowledge to build that game's AI."



that was fundamentally like chess, with a virtual environment for the board. That's why it was so important to talk to each other. And why one-player mode wasn't very good…"

Ever-fascinated by new technology, Reichart remembers the origins of *Return Fire* being a desire to create "*Firepower* on steroids" on a cutting-edge but commercially untested piece of hardware. "*Return Fire* was a huge gamble," he says. "I built a prototype with Will. We were a big team – 20 guys. I brought everyone together and said, 'What would you like to do next?' Will said, 'I'd love to work on a game,' because he'd just come off doing a bunch of utilities for two years. So we kicked it around for a month, bought a few development environments from Nintendo and a bunch of other companies."



"3DO was just coming out; designers Dave Needle and RJ Mical had been showing it to me. I was definitely interested and the more we played with it the more we loved it. We built a prototype of the game – just a very simple mock-up of the idea, basic firing mechanisms, the basic 3D look – and went up and showed it to the 3DO team, and instantly it was obvious we had a hit. We would get phone calls from them saying, 'When are you going to get it done? We want to play it.' Even Trip ended up calling me. That's when you know you're doing well!"

The game's environment, a series of scrolling island bases, is viewed from an unusual angled perspective. "It's not really 3D. It's 2.5D, using math tricks," admits Reichart. "We really built the game backwards. We got the 3DO development environment and began running tests, just getting polygons on screen and rotating them, to see how many we could have before the frame rate took a hit. Then we set up the floor of the office with fake trees and Dinky vehicles and laid out the maps physically. It looked a bit ridiculous, but people could see it from various angles and understand what the game would look like. We realised we didn't have to spin or use yaw; we only had to use pitch. You're basically just moving in Cartesian co-ordinates – up, down, left and right – but it produced a wonderful effect."

The new vehicles in the game, the jeep and helicopter, provide a real highlight when getting into two-player flag-chases, to the manic strains of the *William Tell Overture*. "Balancing *Return Fire* was very difficult compared to *Firepower* due to the number of vehicles," admits Reichart. "We'd put one into the game so we could experience it for a while and then jump to another to see what worked best. We did a lot of that





» [PlayStation] Mowing down enemy squaddies' tents is a laugh, especially if your opponent is still faffing about in his HQ.



» [PlayStation] With many of the islands connected by rickety bridges, tank commanders should be especially mindful of the drink.







type of testing. Because we'd learned our lesson from *Firepower*, we didn't put the point of the game in until the end. We didn't have the flags or even a way to win until the end because it was cocaine – everyone would start playing and we'd lose all productivity. The first time we got the helicopter and jeep timed correctly we lost weeks!"

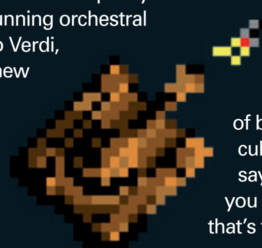
"The islands in *Return Fire* were heavily influenced by *The Prisoner*. In fact, if you try and leave the island a sub will pop out and take you out with an unstoppable white ball," says Reichart. "If we'd had time we wanted to have different ones like a UFO or an octopus to make sure you wouldn't get any further." A good example of the level of whimsy in a so-called war game that added to its broader appeal, Reichart admits that the game's humour was an integral ingredient.

"I wanted a level of hyper-realism," he says. "Things are very real, so there is accountability, but there's that level of ridiculousness. In *Firepower*, the sound effect for the characters being squished is actually Will, making the sound effect to annoy me, but when I first heard it I burst out laughing, and when anybody else heard it they did the same. I thought, 'That's the best thing for a war game' – to take that silly edge off the seriousness of everything." We proceeded to have a good chuckle about the absurdity of the pristine flower beds outside the enemy's HQ that players can merrily plough through with their shiny military vehicles.

Other examples of in-jokes and japery abound in *Return Fire*. "The skeleton that laughs – that's RJ Mical," says Reichart. "We actually went up to 3DO and recorded him because he had the greatest laugh…" Blowing up the 3DO logo at the game's start was 'inspired' by the many arguments with Trip Hawkins about royalties for the game "They loved it as well," grins Reichart. "It was the way we resolved things at the time, through humour rather than lawsuits."

> "3DO got a little angry with me, but it was a wonderful time to build something on a great piece of technology"

The game's soundtrack is also pretty classy, packed with stunning orchestral pieces from Wagner to Verdi, showcasing the then-new CD medium. "At the time I was listening to nothing but classical music and had stacks of CDs," says Reichart.



"All of the in-game music was licensed from EMI. I believe we were the first game to be Dolby encoded in 3D. If you take 3DO *Return Fire* and plug it into a surround sound system, it is just so much fun to have the sound effects coming from behind you and know where you're getting hit from."

The fact that *Firepower* and *Return Fire* can claim to have had a certain influence on the whole real-time strategy genre isn't lost on Reichart. He mentions how Westwood's president Louis Castle told him that one of the games they played while creating *Command & Conquer* was *Firepower*. Finally, he expresses the main ideal of his view on game design: create something you really want to play yourself.

"Actually, 3DO got a little angry with me because I refused to market my product and asked how I expected to sell it without advertising. I said, 'I'm just going to make a good product'," he says. "It was just a wonderful time to build something on a great piece of technology."

Ultimately, like Sensible's *Cannon Fodder*, Reichart considers the game to carry a message. "I have the classic, old Prussian intellectual version of battle in my mind. It's part of my culture, part of the way I think," he says. "But ultimately, I believe that if you have to use war you've failed. And that's the key to *Return Fire*."



IMPORT ONLY

INFO



» **PUBLISHER:** OPERA SOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** PACO MENÉNDEZ
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC
» **ALSO ON:** SPECTRUM 128, PC, MSX
» **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25+

PRICE WATCH

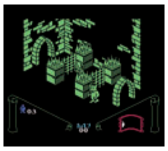
» **Similar titles to splash cash on**

▲ More Expensive Than



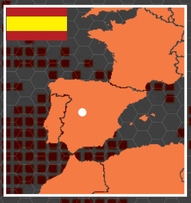
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS
GET IT FOR: **£20**
This superb isometric strategy role-playing game never came out in the UK, which is a shame as it's an excellent adventure with hours and hours of fantastic gameplay. If you have access to a US PSN account, it's even cheaper.

▼ Cheaper Than



KNIGHT LORE
GET IT FOR: **£40**
Only a few Ultimate games were released on the MSX in Japan, and as a result they're extremely hard to come by. *Sabre Wulf*'s sequel is easily the best available.

GAME ORIGIN



» **COUNTRY:** SPAIN
» **POPULATION:** 46,661,950
» **CAPITAL:** MADRID
» **NATIONAL LANGUAGE:** SPANISH
» **CURRENCY:** EURO
» **TIME ZONE:** CET +1

» CO-ORDINATES: 40°26N 3°42W

LA ABADIA DEL CRIMEN

» Taking a change of pace from the usual Japanese imports, Darran Jones instead turns to Spain and uncovers one of the greatest isometric adventures of all time

Believe it or not, one of the best isometric adventures to ever appear on an 8-bit system wasn't by Ultimate, Denton Designs, nor any other UK developer, for that matter. No, the game in question was by a young Spaniard who based his creation on a book that he never managed to obtain the rights for. The novel in question is Umberto Eco's *The Name Of The Rose*; the game, *La Abadia Del Crimen* (*The Abbey Of Crime*), is an 8-bit masterpiece by Paco Menéndez that is well worth playing through, even if you don't understand a word of Spanish.

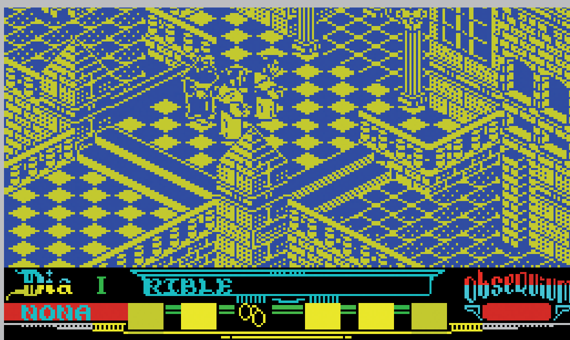
Released by Opera Soft in 1988 and created for the CPC 6128, *La Abadia Del Crimen* is an astonishing piece of work that not only proves to be a genuinely engaging adventure but also features some truly mesmerising design, both in its brilliantly drawn sprites and the immense monastery that the adventure is set in.

Following the plot of the famous book, you take on the role of Fray William, who has been summoned to the out of the way abbey in order to solve the mystery of a missing monk. With only seven days to solve the case, the player is left with not only a massive amount of work on his hands – more so if you're not playing the recently translated MSX2 version – but only a finite amount of time to admire Juan Delcan's gorgeous graphics.

» [MSX2] *Albadia*'s English translation can be found at **soft.mundivia.es/mpazos/abadia/**. It's MSX2-only, however.



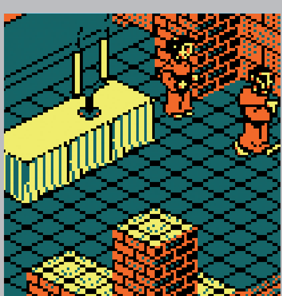
Indeed, *La Abadia Del Crimen*'s visuals are quite frankly stunning on the CPC and easily manage to outdo many of the adventures created by Ultimate. Sprites are full of character and walk around with a convincing gait and the many objects you pick up are instantly recognisable, while the massive abbey easily captures the ancient buildings of old. Huge and imposing, the detail of the ancient citadel is astonishing. Floors are intricately tiled, stained glass windows are full of detail, and even brickwork looks like a work of art, so much care and love has Delcan lavished



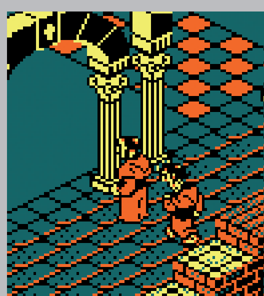
» [Spectrum] This 128k masterpiece is a must-have for Spectrum owners everywhere.



» [Amstrad] *Albadia* features astonishing visuals that put many similar games to shame.



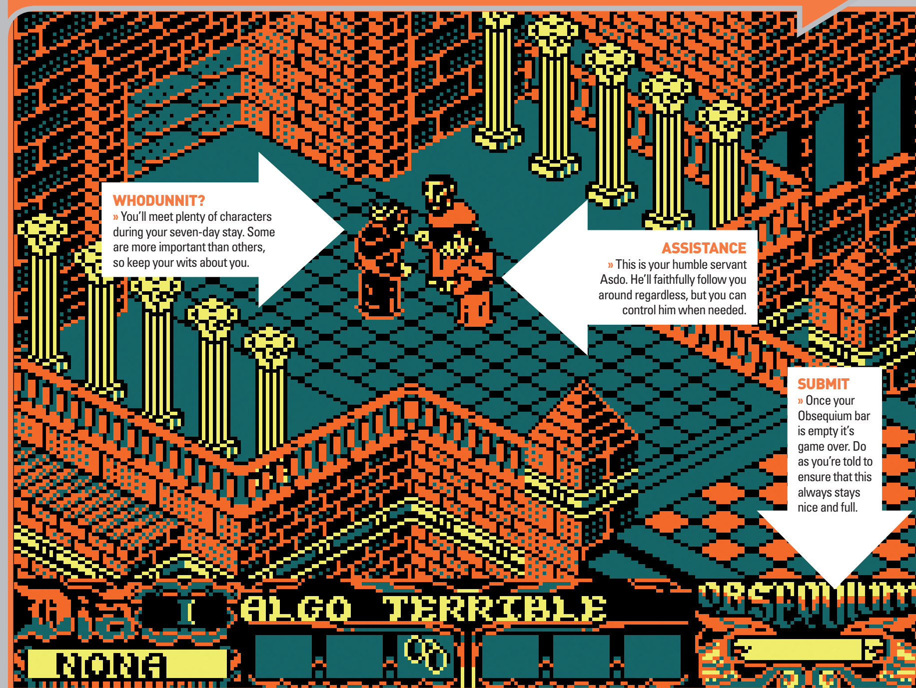
» [Amstrad] *Albadia's* gameplay is reminiscent of Denton Designs' *The Great Escape*.



» [Amstrad] You have just seven days to solve the abbey's mysterious murders.

GO DEEPER

What to look for when playing La Abadia Del Crimen



WHODUNNIT?
» You'll meet plenty of characters during your seven-day stay. Some are more important than others, so keep your wits about you.

ASSISTANCE
» This is your humble servant Asdo. He'll faithfully follow you around regardless, but you can control him when needed.

SUBMIT
» Once your Obsequium bar is empty it's game over. Do as you're told to ensure that this always stays nice and full.

> " One of the best isometric adventures on an 8-bit system wasn't by Ultimate or Denton Designs but a young Spaniard "

GREAT GAMES CAN COME FROM UNEXPECTED SOURCES



upon the project. Ported to both the ZX Spectrum and MSX, the game loses a little in the conversion, but it remains a stunning piece of work that shows just what can be achieved by a small yet dedicated team.

For all its gob-smacking beauty, the real pleasure of *La Abadia Del Crimen* can be found within its perfectly crafted and tightly honed gameplay. If *Abadia*'s visuals perfectly replicated the period that you find yourself in, then its gameplay takes things one stage further by allowing you to feel part of a living, breathing world. At the heart of *La Abadia Del Crimen* is a simple mystery, but you soon discover plenty of twists that keep the story moving nicely forward, and as bodies begin to crop up, you'll have to solve a variety of item-based puzzles in order to stay one step ahead of the abbey's killer.

This is easier said than done, though, for while you have your faithful servant Asdo following your every move and a week to solve the mystery, you also have to seek out important clues while fitting in with everyday life at the monastery.

As with *The Great Escape*, which came out the year before Menéndez's game, other characters will go about their daily business and Fray William must ensure that he's in certain locations at the relevant time. If the player doesn't manage to do this then William's Obsequium level will drop. Allow the Obsequium level to drop to zero and you'll be unceremoniously booted from the abbey and unable to complete your quest. Even seemingly innocuous things like being caught walking around the abbey at night will have you immediately ejected, so the gameplay becomes a clever balancing act as you juggle your sleuthing with the many menial tasks that you must perform.



Originally created for the Amstrad CPC 6128, Menéndez's game was later converted to the Spectrum 128, PC, MSX and CPC 464, while remakes exist for the PC, Game Boy Advance and MSX2, the latter of which has an English translation.

Sadly, despite the brilliance of *La Abadia Del Crimen*, it would turn out to be Paco Menéndez's last ever computer game. He left gaming to complete his degree in telecom engineering, only to tragically take his own life in 1999 after jumping from his Sevillian apartment. He was 34 years old at the time.

CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



THE GREAT ESCAPE
» The setting is, admittedly, completely different, being unsurprisingly set in a WWII prison camp, but in terms of gameplay, this excellent isometric adventure from Denton Designs is the closest you'll get to Paco Menéndez's beautifully crafted game. It's a fantastic title in its own right as well.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Durell Software

As software houses go, Durell couldn't claim to be the most prolific, exciting or successful, but it was responsible for several hits, including Harrier Attack, Saboteur and Turbo Esprit. Martyn Carroll talks to its key people and charts its brief but bright history

The sum of £100 is important in the history of Durell Software, and no, it has nothing to do with the cash reward that the company offered to anyone who dobbed in a dirty pirate. Funnily enough, when Durell is mentioned these days, the topic almost always turns to this infamous £100 reward, so we began by asking Durell founder Robert White about it. Did any playground pirates do jail time for ripping off *Turbo Esprit*? Was the office inundated with illicit tapes and anonymous tip-offs? "It was an absolute hoax," he laughs. "You wouldn't go prosecuting some kid, would you? No one contacted us anyway. The only thing we got were people phoning up and saying things like, 'I've been playing *Combat Lynx* and I landed my helicopter in front of a tank and the tank drove straight through it. Why didn't it blow up?' Piracy was definitely a problem, but the reward was just a bluff really." But what about those special Durell-branded blue cassettes that identified legitimate copies? They must have been expensive. Robert laughs again. "It was simply that our tape duplicator had some blue tapes! That was it. Nothing conscious there at all."

Forget the reward – £100 is important because that's the capital Robert used to start up Durell in 1983. With the money he bought a shiny new Oric-1 computer and taught himself how to program it. Prior to this, his background was somewhat less technical. He actually qualified as an art teacher but soon discovered that half the population had too. "I remember applying for one job and there were 800 applicants," he says. Switching career paths, he gained a degree in quantity surveying and landed a job at the Oxford Regional Health Authority. In his role as a senior architect, he used CAD software to design hospital buildings and quickly developed a fascination with computers, and in particular the notion of using computing to solve problems.

"I was in the job for three years," he says, "but then my wife's grandparents died and we had the opportunity of moving into their house, and that was out in the country in Taunton where there was a great shortage of hospitals to be designed! So I left my job, bought an Oric and basically went to work in my bedroom like a maniac. My start-up capital was the cost of the Oric, and that was all the money I had in the world. So I wrote the first of our games for the Oric to generate some income. They were pretty crap, but they sold really well as there was absolutely nothing available for the computer at the time. I could hardly not sell a game."

Staffing up

The very first Durell games were *Lunar Lander* and *Asteroids* for the 16K Oric. They were sold via mail order and as the orders stacked up, Robert quickly realised

INSTANT EXPERT

The company name comes from one of the middle names of its founder, Robert James Durell White.

Durell Software began life on 14 February 1983 with Robert as its sole member of staff. Ron Jeffs and Mike Richardson joined the company four months later.

Durell's first Oric games (*Lunar Lander* and *Asteroids*) were written in BASIC and the listings were annotated with explanatory REM statements, the idea being that budding programmers could understand how the games worked.

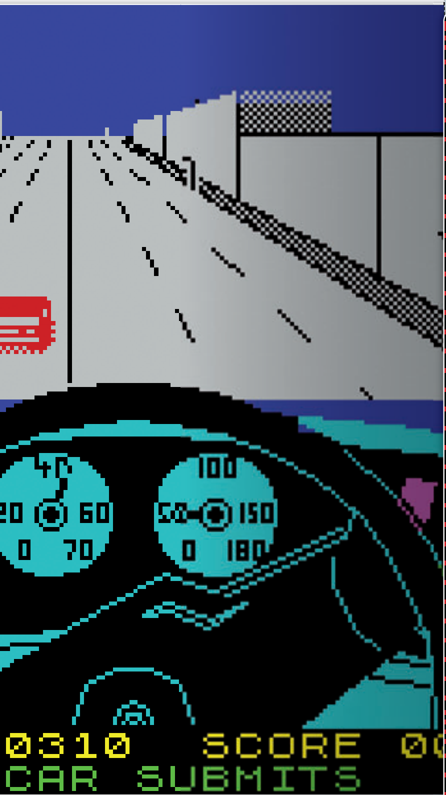
In-house programmers were on a salary, but they were also paid a royalty of 50p per game sold.

***Harrier Attack* was** bundled with the Amstrad CPC464, adding another 100,000 units to the game's already stellar sales figures.

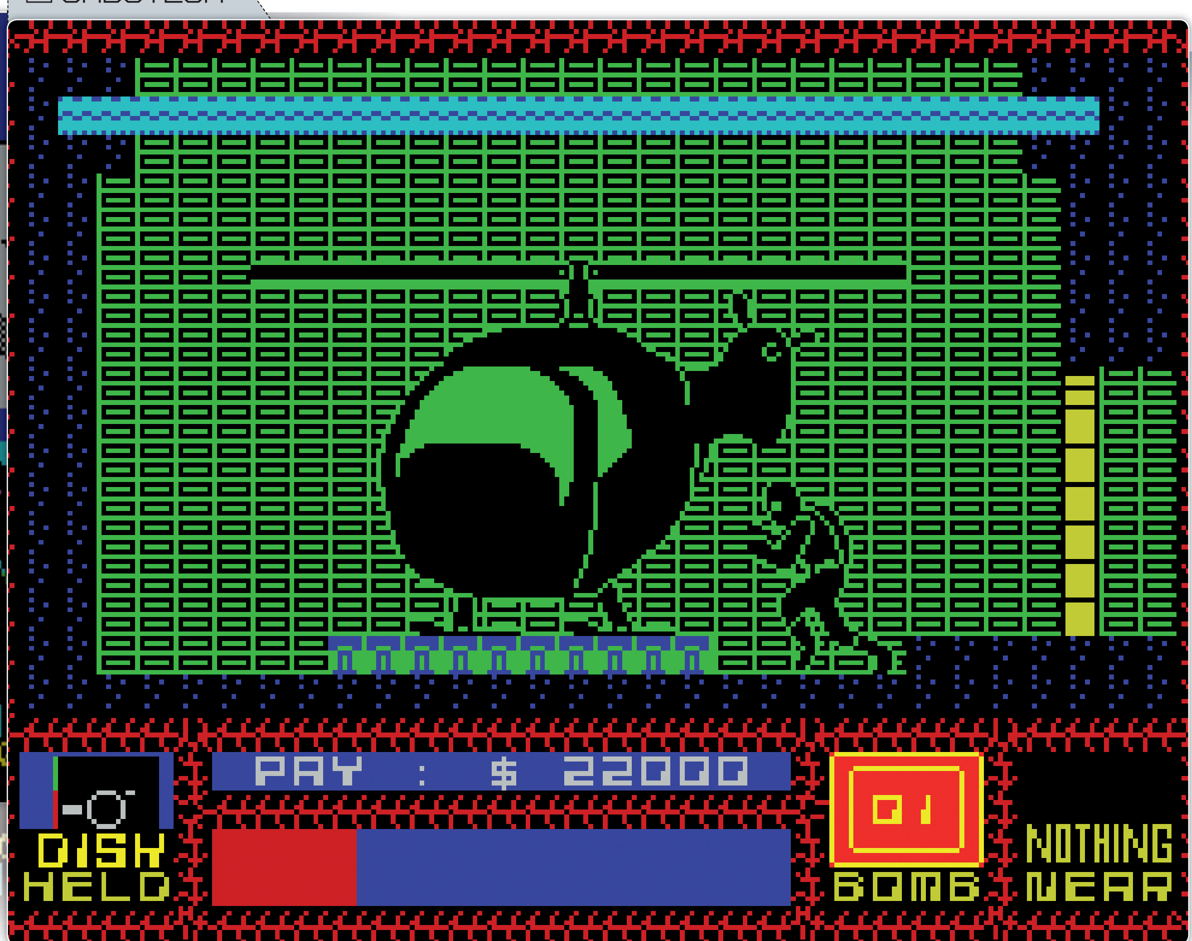
Despite releasing games on multiple formats, the Spectrum emerged as Durell's lead platform. Robert puts this down to Mike Richardson's skill with the machine.

***Saboteur* was the** only Durell game to receive a sequel. According to Clive Townsend, it was simply down to the success of the first game.

***Turbo Esprit* is** often held up as the precursor to the *GTA* games, yet DMA Design's Mike Dailly has told us that the chief inspiration for *GTA* was the *Syndicate* games.



SABOTEUR



that he didn't have enough hands to write programs and run the company at the same time. He needed skilled staff, so he placed an advert in his local newspaper looking for machine code programmers. The ad was answered by Ron Jeffs and Mike Richardson.

"It was one of those fluke things," says Ron. "I wasn't actually looking for a job, but my wife was. So we got the local paper and were looking through the vacancies and came across Robert's advert. I rang him and drove out there the same day and came home with an Oric under my arm!" Originally hailing from Brighton, Ron was an engineer by trade and developed an interest in programming after picking up a Sinclair ZX80. He left the German company Nixdorf Computer to join Durell at the age of 46.

Mike was 20 years Ron's junior, but in similar fashion, his interest in programming was initially just a hobby. "I used to work in an aerosol factory and I studied part-time at Bristol Polytechnic," he reveals. "Eventually I got an MSc in instrumental chemical analysis, and I was still doing that when I first started with Durell."



"I rang Robert and drove out there the same day and came home with an Oric under my arm"

RON JEFFS MAKES IT THROUGH DURELL'S STRINGENT HIRING POLICY

Robert hired Mike on the strength of a quaint Spectrum game he'd written called *Jungle Trouble*. "I saw a television advert for a game, which I think must have been *Pitfall*, and the game grew from that," says Mike. "It took me about five or six months to complete, but I was only doing it part-time as I was working at the aerosol factory at the time."

Robert liked the game and later released it for the Spectrum, but before that he had a game idea of his own that he wanted his new recruits to realise.

"The original *Harrier Attack* idea was Robert's," remembers Mike. "He thought that because of the Falklands War, the Harrier had been in the news a lot, and it would be a good idea to do a game based on that. Ron did the first version of the game for the Oric and I worked on the Spectrum version. It was a big help to have the Oric game as a guide as there was no decision-making to do along the way. There were no graphics or code sharing – I looked at what Ron had done, then went and did my own thing."

Ron adds: "Robert explained his idea and it was quite primitive really. You basically took off in your plane and got shot at, and you shot back, and that was it."

Harrier Attack was a simple *Scramble* clone wearing topical trousers, but Robert was convinced that it would be a hit with gamers. He was so certain that he booked £20,000 of advertising to promote the game. "By the time *Harrier Attack* was ready for release around September 1983, I'd used pretty much all of the company's money to pay Ron and Mike to that point, so I went off and booked all this advertising with no way of paying for it! But I was 100 per cent confident that it would work out. I remember saying to ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

29 The age of Robert White when he founded Durell in 1983.

500 The number of tape copies Robert made of his Oric assembler program. He sold them all.

5 The choice of skill levels offered to the player in *Harrier Attack*.

4 The number of Durell Spectrum games that were rated above 90% in *Crash* magazine. (The titles were *Critical Mass*, *Saboteur*, *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* and *Thanatos*.)

0 The number of Durell Commodore 64 games that were rated above 90% in *Zzap!64*.

9 The percentage rating that *Zzap!64* awarded to the Commodore 64 version of *Turbo Esprit*. Yes, it really was that bad.

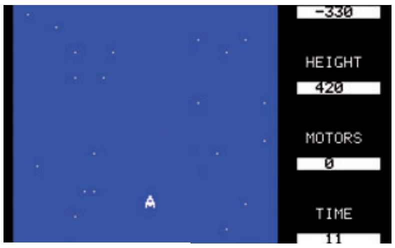
10 The number of months it took Mike Richardson to create *Turbo Esprit* for the Spectrum. This was the longest he spent on any game.

112 The number of screens in *Saboteur*. The sequel was roughly seven times bigger.

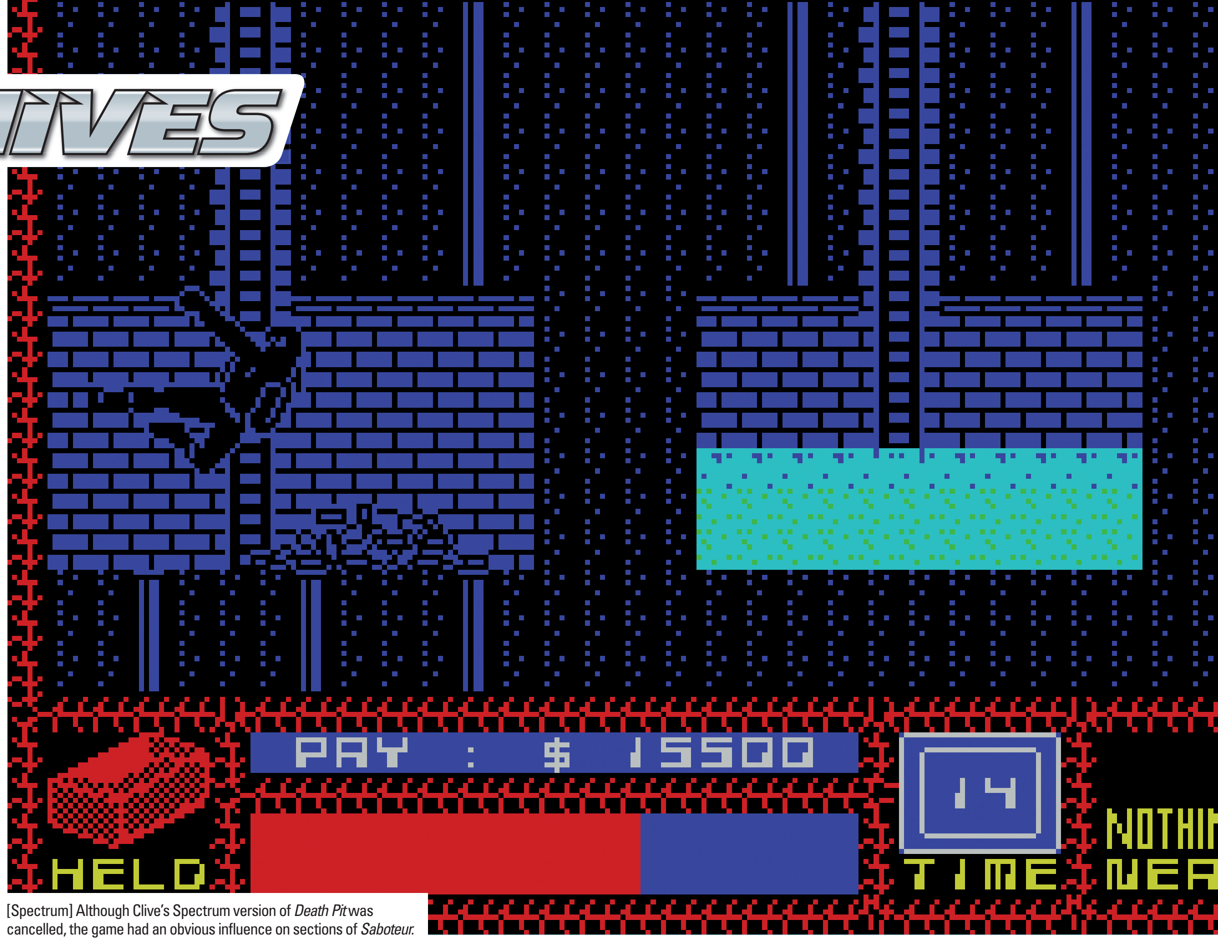
100,000 The number of copies of *Saboteur* sold on its initial release.

250,000 The number of *Harrier Attack* sales, including the copies bundled with the Amstrad CPC464.





[Oric] The BASIC listing of *Lunar Lander* was packed with helpful REM statements to show what each bit of code did.



[Spectrum] Although Clive's Spectrum version of *Death Pit* was cancelled, the game had an obvious influence on sections of *Saboteur*.

my wife one day, 'I think we'll probably make £40,000 by Christmas', and in the end that's roughly what we did. In my architect role I was earning £9,000 a year, so £40,000 was a huge amount of money at the time."

Chart attack

Sales of Durell software suddenly went bonkers. By July 1983 Robert had managed to shift 800 tapes, but by the end of the year that figure had risen to 20,000. *Harrier Attack* alone went on to sell a colossal 150,000 copies and the success of this single title funded game development for the next three years.

Mike devoted himself full-time to Durell and began work on underwater jaunt *Scuba Dive*. "Robert wanted us to do a *Frogger*-style game," says Mike. "We had an ideas meeting and decided to replace the frog with a diver and the obstacles with dangerous fish, and it grew from there, eventually into more of an exploration game." *Scuba Dive* was followed by *Combat Lynx*, an ambitious game that put players in control of a military attack helicopter. Although *Harrier Attack* was wildly successful, Mike wasn't about to replace the plane sprite with a chopper and be done with it. Instead, he crafted a game that was part shooter, part simulation, and featured great 3D graphics. "I always had a thing about not repeating myself," he says when asked about avoiding the easy option. "Besides, I had an idea about how to do a 3D landscape after seeing the output from a scanning electron microscope while I was doing a chemistry course."

> **"Sales had risen from 800 tapes to 20,000. Harrier Attack went on to sell 150,000 copies"**
> DURELL HITS THE GROUND RUNNING WITH ITS FIRST HIT

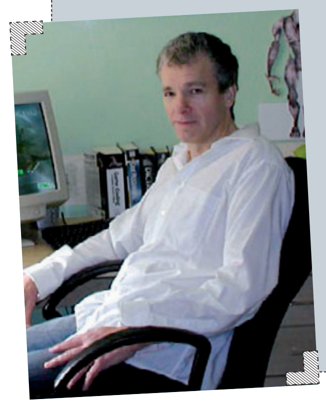


Thanatos came after Robert's decision to leave gaming for the more stable and predictable world of business software.

Robert realised early on that for a game to be a success, it needed to appear on as many platforms as possible. Lots of conversion work was handed to Ron Jeffs, who rewrote *Scuba Dive* for the Oric and *Combat Lynx* for the Commodore 64. Ron went on to port several more games to the C64 – and not just because he was familiar with the 6502 processor, which powered both the Oric and, in modified form, the C64. "It was partly because I had a grounding in the 6502 processor, but largely because Robert simply needed someone to write versions of the games for the C64. And because Mike was so good on the Spectrum, I stepped in to do the C64 stuff. I always thought the 6502 was one of the best processors anyway. It was so simple and that made it so fast. It really put the onus on the programmer to be smart with it."

Mike turned his hand to the Amstrad CPC when it was launched in 1984 and he quickly converted *Harrier Attack* to

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Robert White

The founder of Durell Software now runs Durell Solutions out of the same office complex in Taunton. The company provides administration software to the insurance industry. "Doing games was not a lot different from what we're doing now," he says. "It's about coming up with ideas to solve problems and trying to present the solutions attractively."

Mike Richardson (pictured)

Apart from a spell when he worked with Robert on business software, Mike has been involved with games for the past 20 years. He has written games for the PC, PlayStation and 3DO, and is currently working on iPhone software. In his spare time, he is studying maths at the Open University. He also likes to mess with electronics. "For Christmas I got a PIC microcontroller programmer board kit. I haven't done any soldering for a long time so I'm looking forward to playing with that."

Clive Townsend

The *Saboteur* creator now runs Incognito Games, which has produced many titles for mobile phones, including the 2007 hit *Sonic Jump* and the official *X Factor* game. In his spare time he plays too much *FarmVille* on Facebook.

Ron Jeffs

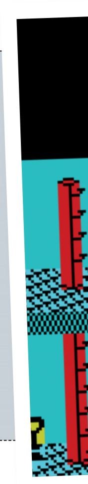
Ron has worked with Robert since 1983. He was Durell's head of support from 1988 until 2009, and now, aged 72, he has taken on a part-time role. According to Robert, he's still a very much appreciated member of the team.

Julian Todd

For the past 17 years, Julian has used his geometric talents to write algorithms for CNC Machine Tools, based in Norwich. For fun he works on "disruptive political websites".

Nick Wilson

Nick has worked in the games industry for a number of years since he wrote *Deep Strike*, including a spell making games for Eidos. He currently runs StarByte Software, which is behind the iPhone games *Black Mamba Racing* and *NEX*.



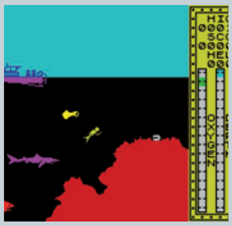


SIX OF THE BEST

Harrier Attack
[1983]
Included not because of its importance in the history of Durell, but because it's a great little game in its own right that's perfect for quick blasts. It's probably best remembered on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, yet the Commodore 64 version comes out on top thanks to its slick graphics and decent sound effects.



Scuba Dive
[1984]
Mike Richardson's first game of note was this cracking marine adventure, which saw the player salvaging treasure from the deep while avoiding all manner of underwater beasties. It's littered with lovely little touches, like the moving boat on the surface and the big ol' octopus guarding entry to the deeper caverns below.



Saboteur
[1985]
Yes, the game where you could kick dogs to death, but there's much more to *Saboteur* than wanton canine cruelty. The emphasis was on exploration, and discovering new areas in the huge enemy complex was perhaps more satisfying than actually completing the mission objective itself. *Saboteur* is a true 8-bit classic.



Turbo Esprit
[1986]
Widely considered to be Durell's finest release, this exceptional driving game invited you to race through 3D cities and bust drug smugglers while obeying traffic signals, pelican crossings and other rules of the road. Pretty epic – by the standards of the Spectrum, at least – and you can't say that about many 8-bit games.

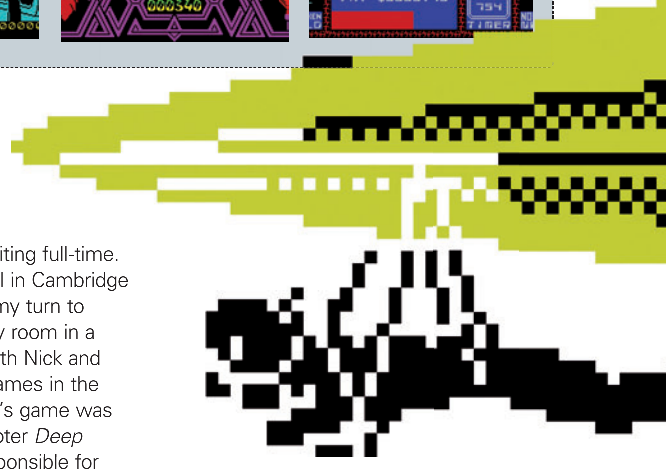


Thanatos
[1986]
Durell games often featured flashy, high-tech scenarios, so this fantasy arcade game set in medieval times was a welcome change. Graphically it was amazing, particularly the main dragon sprite, but as with all of Mike Richardson's work, it was the little details about it that really stood out. A game made with obvious affection.



Saboteur II
[1987]
Subtitled *Avenging Angel*, the sequel featured a face-kicking female protagonist, which was a novel twist at the time. *Saboteur II* just about had the edge over the original – the game map was bigger and there were distinct missions that increased replay value. Plus, you could bust out of the enemy base on a red motorbike…





the new machine. The game attracted the attention of Alan Sugar, who was desperate for software to publish on his Amsoft label. The deal was done and *Harrier Attack* became one of the games bundled with the computer. "Alan is a smart businessman," says Robert. "You don't get a lot out of Alan Sugar. It was nice to shift an extra 100,000 copies through Amstrad, but he was on a very tight budget. I doubt in the end if he even paid 10p a copy. It wasn't a great deal for us, but it was a nice little extra."

For the BBC Micro, Robert looked to a couple of young programmers who had previously written games for the Acorn machine. Nick Wilson and Julian Todd were two school friends who grew up just 20 miles away from Durell's offices in Taunton. "We sold Durell one game for the BBC Micro called *Mineshaft*," says Julian, picking up the story. "Then we ported *Combat Lynx* from the Spectrum to the BBC over many weekends in Nick's bedroom. When that was done, Nick dramatically cleared his desk in the middle of the week and dropped out of school to pursue games writing full-time. Later, after attending school in Cambridge for several months, it was my turn to drop out. I rented a crummy room in a shared house in Taunton with Nick and we each worked on new games in the Durell Software attic." Nick's game was the impressive biplane shooter *Deep Strike*, while Julian was responsible for the utterly bizarre – but in a good way – *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky*.

New recruits

More fresh faces soon appeared. Simon Francis was a college kid who impressed Robert with a dungeon game he'd written for the Dragon 32 called *Pit Fiend*. He joined the company in early 1985 and reworked *Pit Fiend* as *Death Pit* for the Amstrad CPC, then authored the *Dune*-inspired Spectrum game *Critical Mass*.

Another new starter was budding Z80 programmer and martial arts enthusiast Clive Townsend, who happened to live on Durell's doorstep in Taunton. He hung around the offices and was initially employed as a graphics dogsbody. His first two games as a programmer – a platformer called *Chicken* and the Spectrum version of *Death Pit* – were both canned, but it was a useful learning experience as he acquired enough machine code knowledge to bring alive his 'pet project', an arcade adventure he'd named *Ninja*. "Clive had a great visual sense and one day he came in with some graphics of people who could punch and stuff," remembers Robert. "I said, 'That would make a great game, so let's come up with a storyline and put it together.'" That's exactly what they did, and the result was *Saboteur*, a solid-gold smash that went on to sell more than 100,000 copies and become Durell's second bestselling game after *Harrier Attack*.

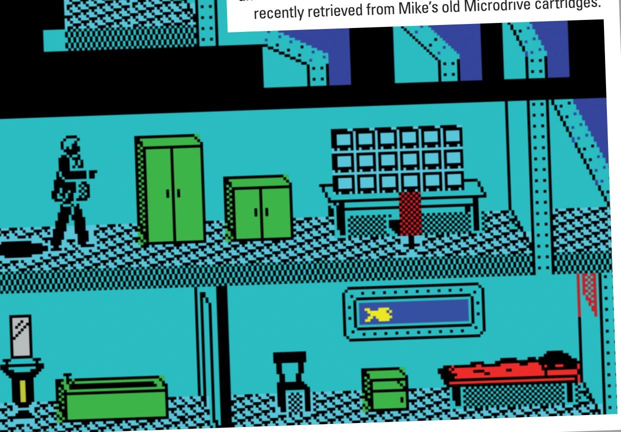
While *Saboteur* was assailing the charts, Mike was busy fine-tuning his most ambitious project yet. "It was Robert who suggested that I should do a driving game," he says. "He wasn't very specific. It was also his idea to tie it in with Lotus." With the basic concept in place, Mike went off and created the Spectrum classic *Turbo Esprit*. Making the game's 3D cities come to life was no mean feat for Mike. "I'd just done *Combat Lynx*, so I was keen to use a similar type of 3D system. There were lots of tricks I used to get the speed up. It was all done using a lookup table so there were no 3D calculations. I really had to use every available bit in the Spectrum to do it."

Turbo Esprit sold 50,000 copies, and while it couldn't match the success of

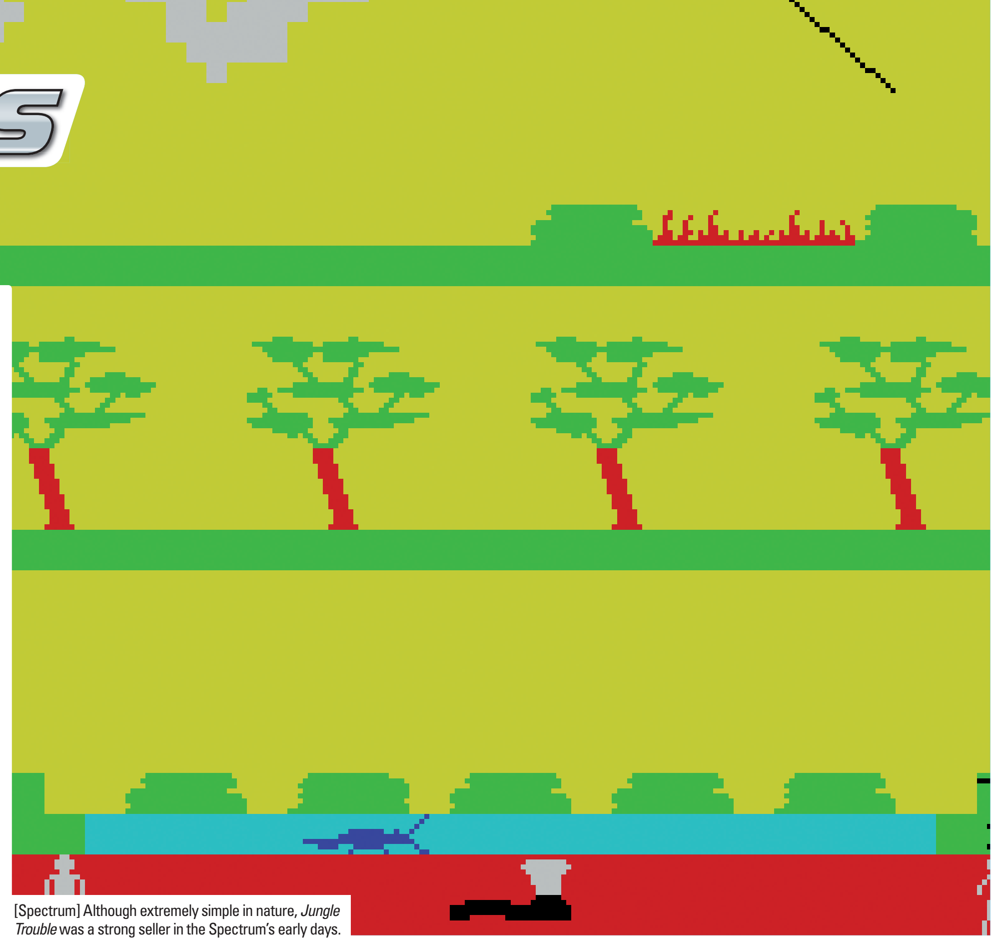
SABOT3UR?

The full story behind the third *Saboteur* game would require an article in itself, so we'll briefly summarise the reasons why you've never had the chance to play it. The first attempt was made by Mike Richardson shortly before Durell sold its games to Elite. A design was drawn up and Mike created a bunch of sprites and even some mocked-up screens, but development ceased when the sale went through. Clive Townsend later started work on his own Spectrum sequel under the title *Saboteur 3D*. A demo was produced but Clive decided to shift development to the PC instead. The game then went through various iterations during the Nineties before being placed on the back burner around 1998, where it remained. More recently, Clive was speaking to a developer about resurrecting *Saboteur 3*, but once again it didn't work out. "Sadly the developer didn't actually set up the company as he'd planned, so nothing was ever done," reveals Clive. "I still have an extensive design document, though, so if there are any serious producers out there, they should get in touch!"

So one day we may get to play a new *Saboteur* game, and there's even a chance that Clive's *Saboteur 3D* demo for the Spectrum may surface. "I found a load of Microdrive cartridges, but none had *Saboteur 3D* on them," he says. "I'm starting to suspect that it was on a Spectrum +3 disk, so I'll have to check the loft…"

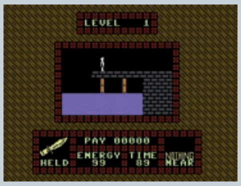


[Spectrum] Here's a glimpse at Mike Richardson's unreleased *Saboteur 3*. This screen, and many others, were recently retrieved from Mike's old Microdrive cartridges.



[Spectrum] Although extremely simple in nature, *Jungle Trouble* was a strong seller in the Spectrum's early days.

THREE TO AVOID



Saboteur Jr [1986]

Okay, so there was no actual game with this title, but we can't think of a better way of referring to the Commodore 16 version of *Saboteur*. Featuring minute graphics and dozens of samey screens, it was a sorry affair all round. At least Plus 4 owners received a version based directly on the Spectrum original.



Sigma 7 [1987]

This misguided space romp was made up of three mini challenges: a *Zaxxon*-style shooter, a *Pac-Man* maze game and a puzzle section. None were particularly bad, but they failed to hang together as a complete title. The isometric graphics were good, though, so maybe it's worth a look for that reason alone.



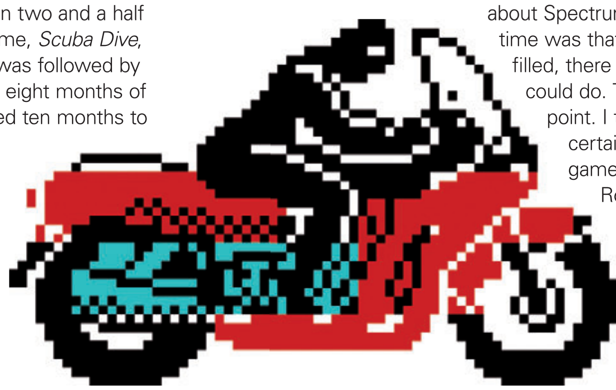
Chain Reaction [1987]

One of Durell's last releases was also one of its least impressive. Reminiscent of Ultimate's 3D games, only without the charm, *Chain Reaction* tasked you with exploring a nuclear power station and gathering up dangerous radioactive waste. Despite you racing against the clock, the gameplay was yawn-inducing.

Saboteur, it proved that the firm could still produce sizable hits in a marketplace that had become much more competitive. Yet to stay in the race, Durell had to continually strive to develop innovative new products that would stand out from the crowd. It was a challenge that the programmers appeared to relish, but it came at a cost: games were taking longer and longer to develop. Take Mike's Spectrum output, for example: he wrote the Spectrum version of *Harrier Attack* in two and a half weeks, while his next game, *Scuba Dive*, took three months. This was followed by *Combat Lynx*, which was eight months of work, and then he devoted ten months to *Turbo Esprit*.

Mike reveals that no firm deadlines were ever put in place and he never felt under pressure to get a game out the door. "Ten months was a long time, but personally I always felt that it was worth putting in as much effort as possible and would probably have resisted pressure to cut corners quite strongly. One thing about Spectrum development at that time was that once the 48K had been filled, there wasn't much more that you could do. That used to be my cut-off point. I think the lack of pressure certainly did make for a better game, although I can imagine that Robert may have been a bit anxious at times."

> **"By 1987, the financial rollercoaster was too scary. I just couldn't sleep at night"**
> ROBERT WHITE ON HIS DECISION TO GET OUT OF GAMING



Mike was correct and Robert did indeed have cause for concern. "It had become an incredibly risky business," he says. "There was increased competition and we had to keep coming up with new games, new ideas. It soon became that every game we launched was around an £80,000 gamble. Some of the games worked and some didn't, regardless of critical acclaim. For me personally, by the time we got to 1987, the financial rollercoaster was just way too scary. It got to the point where I just couldn't sleep at night, so I made the decision to move into business software."

While the company continued to put out impressive games during this period – Mike's *Thanatos* and Clive's *Saboteur II* were of particular note – Robert began parallel development of a database program aimed at the insurance industry. When between games, programmers would often get involved – Clive remembers working on the graphical interface for the application. Then, in December 1987, Robert made the shift complete by selling the rights to Durell's games to Elite Systems. Elite boss Steve Wilcox was looking to expand and viewed Durell as a decent acquisition: "We had an

TIMELINE

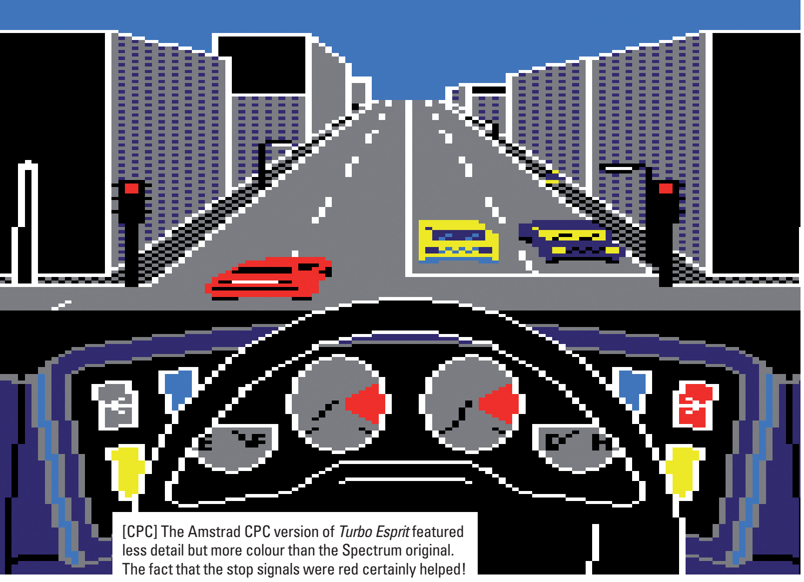
1983
ROBERT WHITE FOUNDS DURELL SOFTWARE IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR, AND RON JEFFS AND MIKE RICHARDSON JOIN IN JUNE. BEFORE THE YEAR IS OUT, DURELL RELEASES SEVERAL GAMES INCLUDING *GALAXY 5* (ORIC), *JUNGLE TROUBLE* (SPECTRUM) AND *HARRIER ATTACK* (ORIC AND SPECTRUM).

1984
DURELL KICKS OFF THE YEAR WITH *SCUBA DIVE* (ORIGINALLY FOR THE SPECTRUM, WITH ORIC AND COMMODORE 64 VERSIONS FOLLOWING), AND ENDS IT WITH *COMBAT LYNX* (AGAIN, WRITTEN FOR THE SPECTRUM BUT PORTED TO OTHER PLATFORMS). THE COMPANY ALSO RELEASES ITS FIRST BBC MICRO GAME, THE *MANIC MINER* VARIANT *MINESHAFT*. *HARRIER ATTACK* IS BUNDLED WITH THE NEW AMSTRAD CPC COMPUTER.

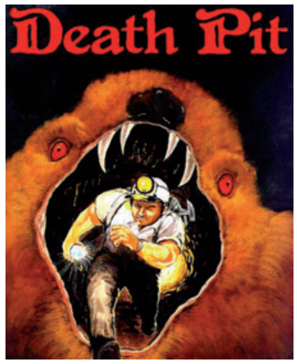
1985
SIMON FRANCIS AND CLIVE TOWNSEND JOIN THE COMPANY. SIMON WRITES *DEATH PIT* FOR THE AMSTRAD CPC AND *CRITICAL MASS* FOR THE SPECTRUM, WHILE CLIVE CODES *SABOTEUR* FOR THE SPECTRUM.

1986
DURELL RELEASES TWO SPECTRUM GAMES BY MIKE RICHARDSON: *TURBO ESPRIT* AND *THANATOS*. FORMER DURELL FREELANCERS NICK WILSON AND JULIAN TODD ARE ADDED TO THE PAYROLL AND THEY AUTHOR *DEEP STRIKE* AND *FAT WORM BLOWS A SPARKY* RESPECTIVELY. THE DURELL *BIG 4* COMPILATION IS RELEASED, FEATURING *COMBAT LYNX*, *CRITICAL MASS*, *SABOTEUR* AND *TURBO ESPRIT*.

1987
SIGMA 7, *SABOTEUR II* AND *CHAIN REACTION* ARE RELEASED. DURELL DEVELOPS ITS FIRST DATABASE PROGRAM (INSURANCE MASTER). AT THE END OF THE YEAR, DURELL SELLS ITS BACK CATALOGUE OF GAMES TO ELITE SYSTEMS AND CONCENTRATES SOLELY ON BUSINESS SOFTWARE.

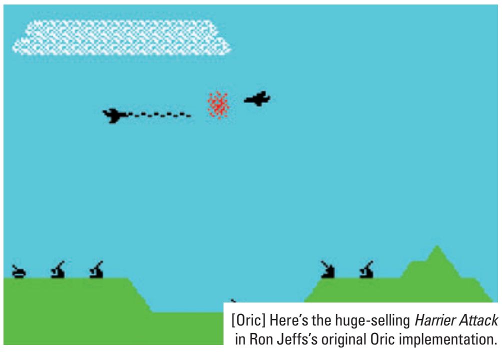


[CPC] The Amstrad CPC version of *Turbo Esprit* featured less detail but more colour than the Spectrum original. The fact that the stop signals were red certainly helped!





Clive Townsend being manhandled by a ninja in this memorable photo, which appeared in *Crash* magazine.



[Oric] Here's the huge-selling *Harrier Attack* in Ron Jeffs's original Oric implementation.

Robert White (right) shows Mike Richardson the capabilities of his Oric computer.



acquaintance with Robert and were keen to continue to grow our business, including our budget and compilation business. We had no significant regrets about the deal we did for the Durell catalogue and would probably have done it again if we had our time over."

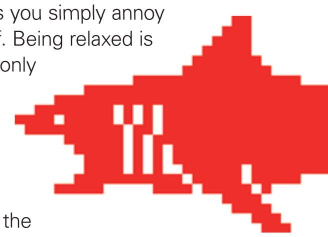
With the games gone, Robert spent the next two years developing his Insurance Master program. The bold move to stabilise the company paid off and it continues to trade to this day under the name Durell Solutions. "We're still developing and selling insurance software, 20 years on. It doesn't make a lot of money, but it never makes a loss. I've kept a lot of people employed for a long time and I feel quite good about that."

Looking back

Durell has now been around for 27 years, and while only the first four years focused on gaming software, the place holds happy memories for those ambitious young programmers who plied their trade in sleepy Somerset. "They were the best years of my working life," says Mike Richardson. "There's no feeling like finding you're good at something, seeing your work on shop shelves, getting amazing feedback from people enjoying your work, and getting paid well for it as a bonus."

Saboteur creator Clive Townsend, who now runs mobile developer Incognito Games, remembers his coding colleagues with fondness: "I think we were all sad when Durell stopped making games, but I'm proud to have worked with such a talented bunch of people. Robert was brilliant. It was a very relaxed atmosphere, and as we didn't actually have design specs for our games, we didn't really have deadlines either! Many of the game designs grew organically, which meant they were finished when they were finished. I've had lots of fun in the industry since, but often big business and red tape can get in the way of creative development. If only more bosses were like Robert."

Julian Todd of *Fat Worm* fame also remembers Robert as a decent and honourable boss: "He barely interfered. Today I do a little bit of management of programmers, and I know it is impossible to hassle them, as you simply annoy them and yourself. Being relaxed is pretty much your only option, whether you like it or not. I would like to meet Robert again now that I have experienced the other side of business. I am fascinated that he pulled it off and made a living out of us kids. He paid 50p per copy sold, and I got cheques totalling several thousand pounds, so he was very honest. He could easily have not paid me anything."



Robert himself feels that it's important to look forward more than back, yet there are reminders of his firm's gaming legacy all around him. Cover art from various Durell hits adorns the office walls, he keeps in regular touch with many of his old employees – indeed, Ron Jeffs still works with him – and the £100 he used to buy that first Oric is still there on the company balance sheet. Above all that, Durell's games are still remembered and revered by too many people to ever let them fade into obscurity. "I think at Durell we had a lot of really original ideas," he acknowledges, then regales us with a fitting tale. "Just yesterday I was on site talking to a potential customer and he said, 'You're not the Durell who wrote *Harrier Attack*, are you?' And I replied, 'Yeah, that was us', and then his partner came in and piped up, '*Saboteur*! That was a great game!' So yes, it's still a lot of fun. I guess people have fond memories of our games, and I do too."

HARRIER DOWN

When **RG** interviewed Mike Richardson about *Turbo Esprit* in issue 36, he revealed that he'd formed a new company called Durell Games and was working on *Harrier Attack II* for the PC. The game, which married the classic 2D gameplay of the original with slick 3D visuals, was made available to download in October 2007 after three years in development. It bombed.

"It was a complete disaster," says Mike. "I think I sold something like six copies. I try not to think about it too much. The main thing I learnt was not to try it again. Before I did *Harrier Attack II* I would hear other programmers saying how it was possible for a game to sell millions or none at all, and I didn't believe it. How is it possible to sell nothing of anything? Now I know I can do it."

After that harsh lesson, Mike went on to work for Electronic Arts, helping out on the PC versions of *Burnout Paradise* and the latest *Harry Potter* game. He has since joined up with his former Durell colleague Nick Wilson at iPod/iPhone game developer StarByte Software. His current project is a racing game called *Black Mamba 3D*.

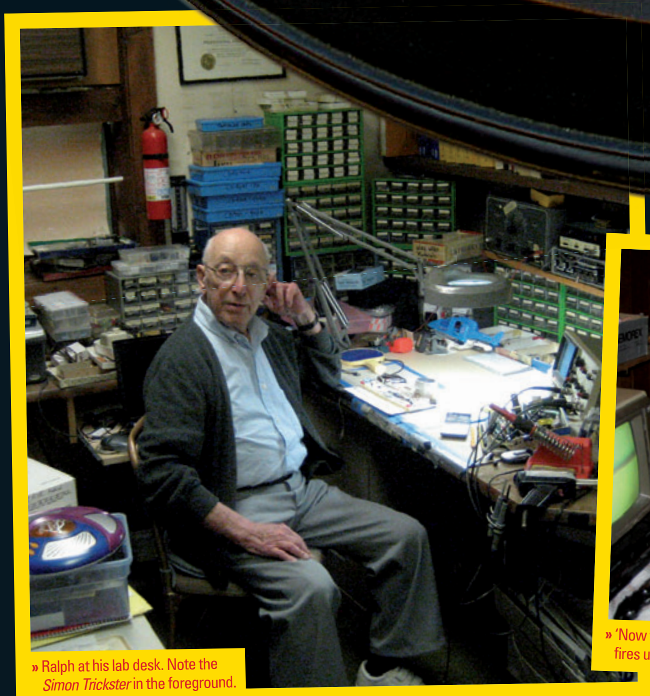




[PC] Mike's long-awaited *Harrier Attack II* sadly failed to get off the ground.

THE MAKING OF...

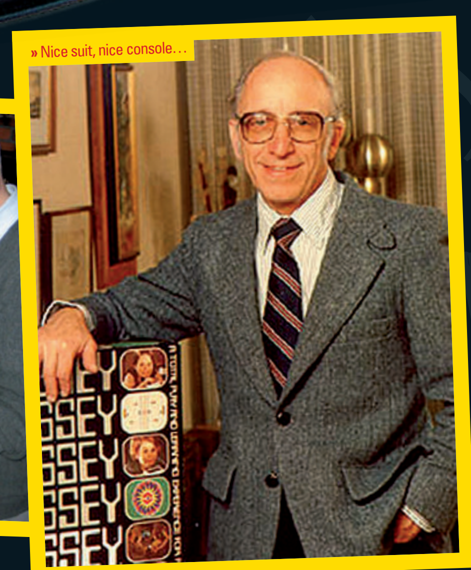




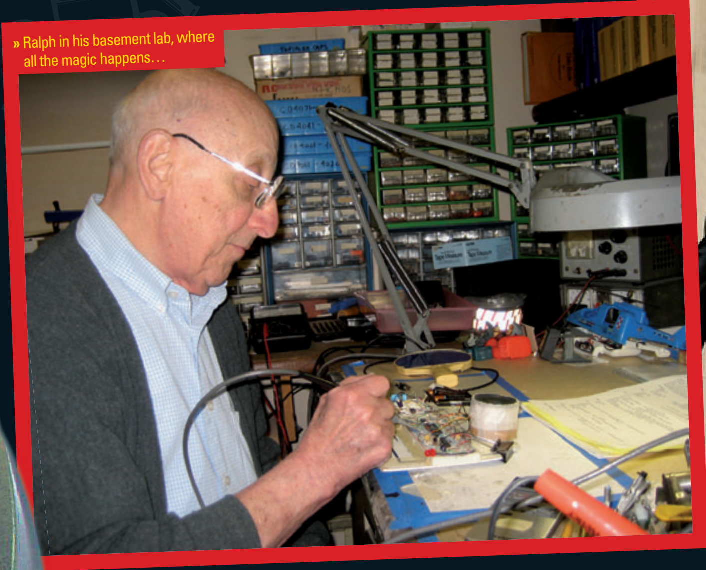
» Ralph at his lab desk. Note the *Simon Trickster* in the foreground.



» 'Now where's that Nolan Bushnell?' Ralph fires up the original console, the Brown Box.



» Nice suit, nice console…



» Ralph in his basement lab, where all the magic happens…



» Baer meets Bush. One of these men made the world a better place. The other…

Four colours, four sounds and an instantly understandable concept. Ralph Baer explains how he created the iconic memory-testing handheld game Simon. Paul Drury follows the leader

Ralph Baer is standing in the kitchen of his New Hampshire home, looking very sprightly for his 87 years. He's just made us eggs over easy for lunch and now he's telling us war stories.

"Yeah, I came to England for D-Day, zig-zagging across the ocean on a British freighter, part of a Royal Navy convoy. I had latrine duty all the way across," he grimaces. "I ended up in some English army barracks somewhere in the south of the country. The weather was abominable. It rained constantly. There was foot-deep mud all over the place. I ended up catching pneumonia and was taken to a field hospital, blood dripping from my nose. Shortly after that, the troops I'd left behind were shipped off to the Normandy beaches…"

So thanks to the miserable English weather, Private Baer was saved from the carnage of D-Day and when he returned to America he kindly invented videogames. Not straight away, of course, but even as early as 1951 he was fiddling with the innards of analogue televisions, mulling over how the patterns and colours he could create on screen might form some sort of interactive entertainment. By 1966, he was sketching out plans for how to play games on your TV set and two years later he had produced a working prototype, the 'Brown Box', that hosted a number of primitive videogames, including a compelling take on ping pong. Ideas and electronics were refined over the following years until, in 1972, Ralph's vision reached the mass market via the Magnavox Odyssey, the world's first home videogame console.

It's an epic tale of how Ralph, with the help of some valuable colleagues, laid the foundation for home videogames through ingenuity, determination and countless hours of soldering and experimenting with game logic. The full story is exhaustively recounted in his book, *Videogames: In The Beginning*, and you'll find an interview with Ralph in **RG** 28. Today, though, we want to ask him about a single chapter of his pioneering work. A simple four-note refrain that came after his rousing opening. This is the story of how the perennially popular handheld game *Simon* came to be.

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MILTON BRADLEY
- » **DEVELOPER:** RALPH BAER/MARVIN GLASS AND ASSOCIATES
- » **RELEASED:** 1978
- » **GENRE:** PATTERN-MATCHING HANDHELD
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £25 FOR AN ORIGINAL MODEL

In November 1976, Ralph was making what had become an annual trip to the AMOA show in Chicago, where the latest coin-ops were being showcased. "I went to these shows on behalf of Sanders and Magnavox to check on the presence of games that might be infringing our patents," explains Ralph. "I'd see who was doing a game that has interaction between machine-controlled and manually controlled symbols, like a ping pong game. I don't care if it's a tank game with a shell bouncing around; it all comes under the same patent. I was looking at stuff, scribbling it down, and sending my notes to Magnavox to say, 'Hey, you wanna check how many units these guys are making and how much money they owe us!'"

As Ralph perused the aisles, he came across something of an oddity. *Touch-Me* was a dark brown, waist-high machine with no screen and just four large buttons on a sloping panel. These buttons would light up in a random sequence, accompanied by crude sounds, and the player was tasked with following the pattern. The game had actually debuted at the show two years earlier and Atari had produced "two or three thousand", according to its chief engineer at the time, Steve Bristow – a respectable number but certainly not aping the runaway success of *Pong* and *Tank*. "I thought it was kinda ugly and had these awful, raspy sounds," recalls Ralph. "But it was an interesting game. In fact, we bought one!"

He wasn't the only one to recognise the potential. Howard Morrison was a partner at Marvin Glass and Associates (MGA),

FOLLOW THE LEADER

"Before *Simon* was even in production, Howard asked me, 'So what do we do for encores?'" says Ralph with a smile. "Lenny was so damn busy that I couldn't rely on him and had to grab a couple of other guys to work on *Amaze-A-Tron*. I remember I came up with the idea to use the corner segments to point to the person whose turn it was, which was pretty cute, I thought. Those little things make a game." Ralph worked on two further successful handheld games, *Computer Perfection* and *Maniac*, at the start of the Eighties and has since produced an incredible array of consumer electronics, ranging from interactive teddy bears to talking doormats, and he still spends much of his day tinkering away in his basement lab."If I shut that off, what would I do? I've already written my autobiography – 500 pages with pictures and moving images that I hope will be published on the fourth generation of electronic books some day – and I was presented with the National Medal of Technology by President Bush in 2006. It doesn't get much better than that!"



THE MAKING OF… SIMON



> **"I got a cheque for $10,000 for Simon. Better than nothing, but peanuts compared to the $30 million they must have made"**
>
> Ralph on following the money…



» In the beginning was the Box, and Ralph said, 'Let there be dots of light…'



» Atari's *Touch-Me* coin-op, where the *Simon* story began.



» Ralph's first post-*Simon* project was *Amaze-A-Tron* for Coleco.



then the premier US independent toy and game design group. Ralph had recently become part of the team, splitting his time between working on new products at the company's Chicago offices and beavering away in his basement lab at his home in Manchester, New Hampshire. Howard had also played *Touch-Me* at the show and both men agreed that, though it was severely lacking in visual and aural appeal, the gameplay had a certain charm. Noting the recent release of *Football* by Mattel and other early handhelds from Milton Bradley, the pair began discussing the possibility of creating their own portable version.

"We thought it was worth a shot," says Ralph. "We outlined a brief spec and, in November and December, I built a hardwired breadboard system and designed a four-tone generator so that Howard could 'play' with it and get a feel for the game. He even demonstrated the game to one of MGA's managing partners, Jeffrey Breslow, by drawing four squares on a sheet of paper and imitating the sequence of lighting segments and sound. Jeffrey said: 'This is gonna work! Tell Baer to go ahead.'"

With the nod given to the project, which at this stage was known as '*Follow-Me*' or '*Tap-Me*', Ralph brought on board young software guru Lenny Cope. The pair had worked together on a programmable record player earlier that year, which had used the Texas Instruments TMS-1000 microprocessor, and they decided to build their game around this chip. Work began in earnest on 3 January 1977, but coding for the TMS-1000 was definitely not as straightforward as the gameplay they were trying to create.

"It was very crude and slow as molasses," chuckles Ralph. "Writing programs for it was a real chore. We had a Teletype terminal that Lenny used to communicate with a computer somewhere in Pennsylvania. Texas Instruments' program for the device was resident on that machine. Communicating at a couple of hundred baud per second took forever and the monthly telephone bills that ensued looked like the national debt! But Lenny was a smart guy and he coped."

Meanwhile, Ralph was busy designing and building the physical unit, containing a version of the TMS-1000 with external ROM, four light bulbs and push-button switches, and a loudspeaker. The sounds that were to come out of that speaker were still to be determined, a key decision considering the unpleasant audio of the original *Touch-Me* machine. Then, as he was flicking through his children's Compton's Encyclopedia, Ralph found an instrument that could play a variety of tunes using just four notes. "The bugle!" he laughs, taking that very book from his shelf and opening it at the page where he had his epiphany over 30 years ago. "Back when you're in your fifties, not eighties, a hell of a lot of things come together quickly in your head. I realised that if we programmed the beeps to be the notes G, C, E and G like the bugle, they would sound good played in any sequence. Perfect!"

The project, now entitled '*Feedback*', was definitely on song. A fully functioning square unit was presented to potential clients in the summer of 1978, and the first to see it, Milton Bradley, said yes. However, Ralph and Lenny still had one obstacle to overcome before the game reached the shops: Dorothy Wooster, PhD.

"She was a pain in the ass," says Ralph, shaking his head. "She was the daughter-in-law of the president of Milton Bradley. She was a psychologist and had to pass judgement on whether the kids would play with this little thing. She said, 'Yes they will, if you add this, change this,' and next thing I know, we've got two more switches, different difficulty levels, different versions and on it goes… All we got is 1K of friggin' memory and a 4-bit processor! How were we gonna do all this? The suitcase is kinda full! So we had to rearrange stuff, so to speak…"

SIMON SAYS

After the launch of the original Simon in 1978, many different models and variations followed. Here are four of our favourites

POCKET SIMON

Two revisions of the classic model appeared in 1980, the first being this charming pocket version. Remember, we all had bigger pockets in the Eighties. And bigger hair.

SUPER SIMON

This earned its '*Super*' tag by introducing head-to-head and team play and doubling the number of buttons to eight. Try playing Fast Hands on maximum speed. Ouch.

SIMON GAME WATCH

You've always got time for a quick bit of pattern-matching, courtesy of this watch version from Nelsonic. See also the miniature key chain model.

SIMON: TRICKSTER

This modern update includes a classic mode alongside the colour-shifting *Simon Bounce* and the follow-me-backwards *Simon Rewind*. Still on sale today, over three decades after the original was launched.





» Some of the wonderful creations that Ralph's had his hand in over the years

The package was certainly bulging by the time it reached the market in 1978, but the colossal success of Ralph's pattern-matching plaything – a million sold that Christmas, 2 million the following year, and countless more in the subsequent decades – may have partly been due to some cosmetic changes made by a nameless employee before it went into production. "Some unsung genius changed the name to *Simon*, which made perfect sense, and made it round with pie-shaped segments that light up," explains Ralph. "It was just serendipity that when *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* came out, the mothership was round and made sounds like *Simon*. When I saw the movie I said, 'Hey, it's *Simon* coming in!' I'm sure subliminally, it helped sales."

Equally otherworldly was the launch of *Simon* to the press. The flamboyant VP of Milton Bradley, George Dittomassi, organised a glitzy affair at the infamous Studio 54 nightclub in downtown New York. Ralph recalls the surreal scene well. "I was ferried to Studio 54 with some of the Marvin Glass partners by stretch limo from the Waldorf Astoria hotel, courtesy of Milton Bradley. I got a kick out of watching the crowds on the sidewalk part like the Red Sea did for Moses when we got out of that limo and entered the club. Maybe we looked like a bunch of Mafiosi to them. Inside, the noise was horrendous and there were all these flashing lights. Howard and I retreated upstairs and nothing happened until about two in the morning. Then, finally, they turned off the din coming from the DJ, everyone stopped dancing or whatever you call that stuff they were doing down there, and a four-foot diameter *Simon* floated through the air above the heads of all these zonked-out patrons…"

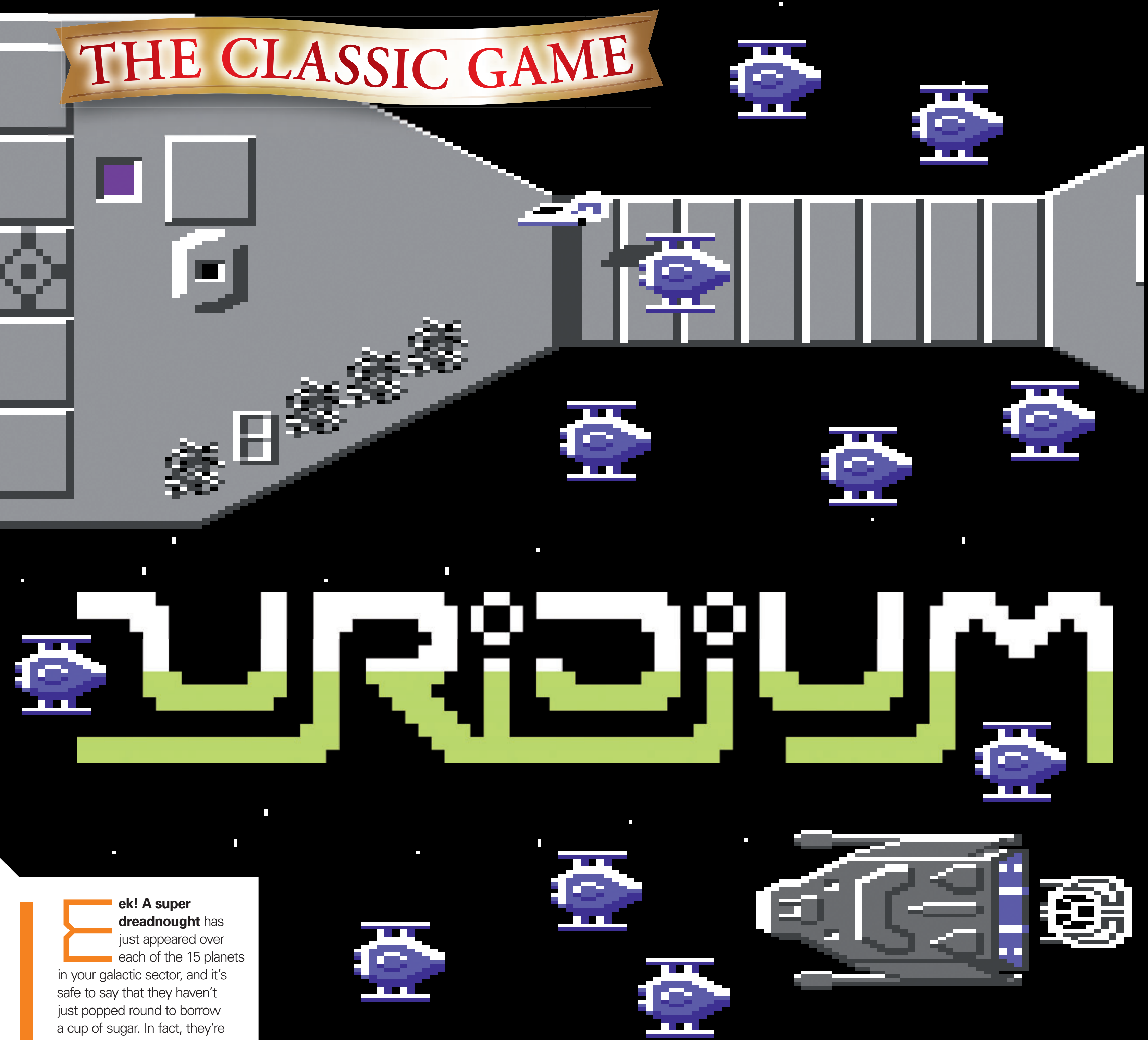
One can only speculate what those coked-up clubbers made of this particular strain of *Saturday Night Fever*, but *Simon* was undoubtedly a hit and made Marvin Glass and MB Games a fortune. Ralph received a cheque for $10,000 – "better than nothing, but peanuts compared to the $30 million they must have made," he quips – but the success of *Simon* actually gave him huge satisfaction for an entirely different reason. Back in May 1972, when Magnavox was promoting its revolutionary new TV game, the Odyssey, one Nolan Bushnell played on a machine at a dealer's open-house event in Burlingame, California. He went home and instructed one of his engineers, Al Alcorn, to work on a coin-op version of the Odyssey's ping pong game. The resulting *Pong* would not only launch Atari but kick-start the whole arcade business.

"It always annoyed me to hear Nolan referred to as the 'inventor' of videogames," says Ralph. "I think he's just a self-promoter. He's smart, he's smooth, he looks attractive, he's got all that, but he hasn't the courtesy to credit other people. Steve Mayer, who headed up the Grass Valley group at Atari that developed *Touch-Me*, says it was Nolan who first came up with the idea of some form of sound sequence game. We managed to make a success of it and so, unintentionally, I managed to upstage him for once."

With a broad smile, Ralph gives us a tour of his basement, where the amazing collection of all the games and gadgets he's invented over the years are proudly on show. We finish by playing a game of ping pong on an actual Brown Box, the grandfather of all the consoles currently sitting under your telly. He beats us soundly, mainly due to his masterly use of spin. "We call it 'adding some English' over here," he winks. How apt.

A special thank you to Ralph for his hospitality and help with the images for this article. You can order his book *Videogames: In The Beginning* from **www.rolentapress.com** and find out more about his incredible career at **www.ralphbaer.com**

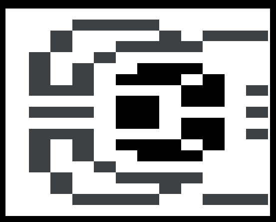
THE CLASSIC GAME



URIDIUM

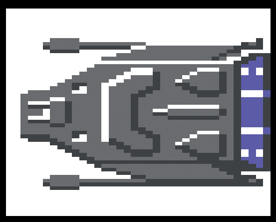
Eek! A super dreadnought has just appeared over each of the 15 planets in your galactic sector, and it's safe to say that they haven't just popped round to borrow a cup of sugar. In fact, they're draining planet cores to drive their power units – and they didn't even ask nicely.

Presumably due to the typical government cutbacks seen in every other shoot-'em-up ever, all that's available to take on these monstrous foes is a squadron of single-seat fighters. Each dreadnought is attacked in turn, your Manta engaging surface defences and enemy fighters before landing and activating a self-destruct sequence via a mini-game that looks suspiciously similar to something you'd find on a fruit machine. This can only be, as long-time C64 fans will know, *Uridium*.



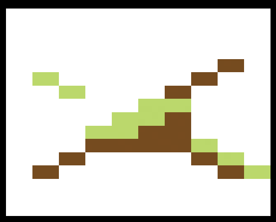
THE MANTA

Your ship, the Manta, is the key to the game. Although it offers plenty of firepower via its dual guns, its manoeuvrability is more important. Learn to control your craft's speed and flips to avoid hostile foes and ensure that you don't smash into dreadnought shields and comms towers.



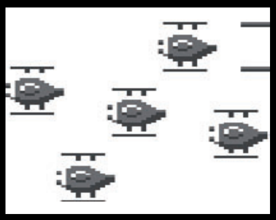
YOUR TRANSPORTER

The transporter is the first thing you'll see in each level of *Uridium*. It transports the Manta to the next dreadnought, and you're treated to a rather lovely animation as your ship exits to do battle. There's no practical reason for this item's existence, but it adds polish to the game.



HOMING MINES

Each of *Uridium*'s dreadnoughts has flashing ports on its surface. Be wary of these, because they house lethal mines that home in on your craft. Each mine only has limited fuel, and so if you can avoid it for a few seconds, you'll be fine – although later levels often launch them in pairs.



ALIEN SCUMBAGS

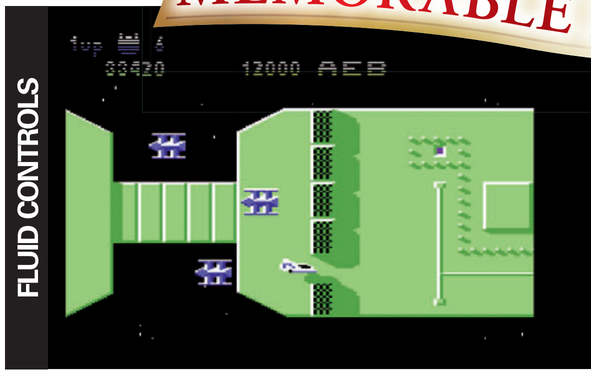
Enemy craft in *Uridium* increase in ferocity as you move through the game, but similar tactics work on even the highest levels. Ships in the game all have forward-facing guns, so stealthily sneak past and shoot them from behind. Waves are pre-set, so learn their movements and firepower.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



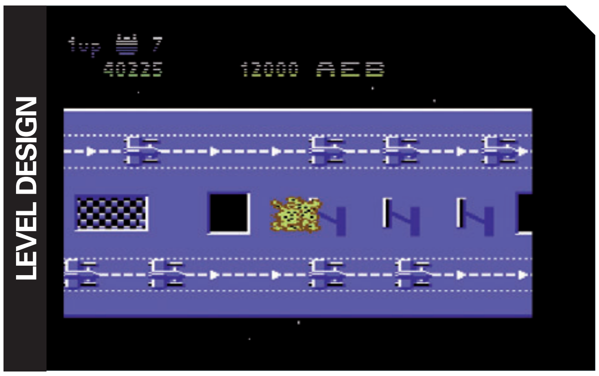
Speed, focus and a strong foundation

Uridium arrived in 1986, before *R-Type*-style shooters with weapon upgrades invaded the C64, and so it might seem simple. However, Andrew Braybrook's *Paradroid* follow-up has plenty to engage the arcade-oriented gamer. First, it's fast: at top speed, dreadnoughts zoom past and you need lightning-fast reactions to survive. Secondly, the game is focused: it has its aims and achieves them with style and polish. Finally, the foundation is strong, frantic and fun, so much so that *Uridium* was followed by *Uridium+* on the C64 and an impressive, expanded but still action-packed Amiga sequel, *Uridium 2*.



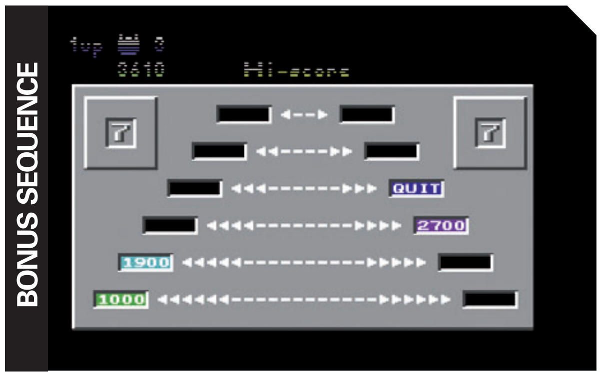
A manoeuvrable Manta

Around the time of *Uridium*'s release, most C64 shoot-'em-ups had craft little different from the *Space Invaders* laser cannon – you could move left, right and fire, and if you were lucky, you might also be able to move up and down a bit. By comparison, *Uridium*'s beautifully animated Manta is hugely manoeuvrable, with a number of cruising speeds, and the ability to flip over to chase hostile aliens and fly at an angle, in order to squeeze through gaps between shields and communications devices that litter the dreadnought surfaces. Only by mastering the Manta will you make any progress in *Uridium*.



Death from below

Much like Andrew Braybrook's previous games, *Gribbly's Day Out* and *Paradroid*, *Uridium* isn't an out-and-out shooter – you can't just wade in, all guns blazing, and hope to make it to the end of each level. Instead, you must map out each dreadnought in your mind, memorising danger areas, escape routes, clusters of Manta-destroying comms towers and shields, and the location of the primary landing strip that enables you to infiltrate the dreadnought's onboard system and blow it to kingdom come. Later levels are especially devious, with maze-like surfaces that require particularly skilful flying.



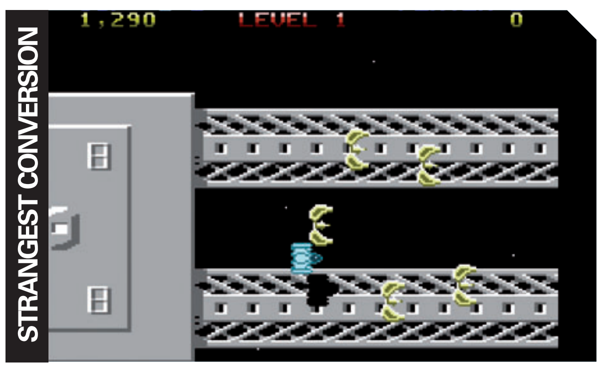
Don't be a quitter

We suspect that Andrew Braybrook perhaps quaffed a little too much coffee while putting together *Uridium*, our evidence being its bonus section. Whereas Jeff Minter's *Batalyx* – another 1986 C64 shooter with a bonus round – plonks you in 'psychedelic noodling land' if you fancy a break, *Uridium*'s end-of-wave respite comes in the form of a bonus game. Instead of enabling you to relax, it keeps the tension high, taking the form of a simple fruit machine-style timing test: at each 'level' you hit fire to hopefully select a chunky bonus rather than quit and return to the game proper.



Die (again), alien scum!

Although rather lacking in red pixels, *Uridium*'s one of the more bloodthirsty games on the C64. True, you're not faced with the dying eyes of alien foes, but there is a rather vicious element to the game once a level's complete. Post-bonus round, you're informed that the destruct sequence has been primed, and you're then returned to the game. As the dreadnought vaporises before your very eyes, there's just time for one more fly-past, and you can strafe any remaining surface targets for bonus points, presumably yelling 'Take that, alien vermin!' as you do so.



The Last Starfighteridium

Although very much designed for the C64, *Uridium* nonetheless made its way to a handful of other platforms. The ZX Spectrum port was particularly good, and there were workmanlike efforts for the BBC Micro and Amstrad CPC. By far the strangest conversion, though, was to the NES. Arriving in 1990, Mindscape's *The Last Starfighter* – released six years after the middling movie, making it a strange tie-in in itself – was *Uridium* in all but name. Some elements were altered – the main ship's different, and the transporter's absent – but otherwise this is a surprisingly faithful, if curious, NES remake of a C64 original.

What the press said… ages ago

Zzap!64 (94%)

"*Uridium* is truly an impressive game, immaculate in both its execution and conception. The Manta is very responsive indeed and is a pleasure to control, skilful handling providing a similar joy to that of *Defender*. Overall an excellent game that should be on every 64 owner's software shelf."

C&VG (10/10)

"Andrew Braybrook's *Uridium* is simply the best 64 game we've seen since *Fist*. It's good-looking, sounds great, and the action comes thick and fast. If you're a 64 owner and you don't rush out and grab this game, there's no hope for you."

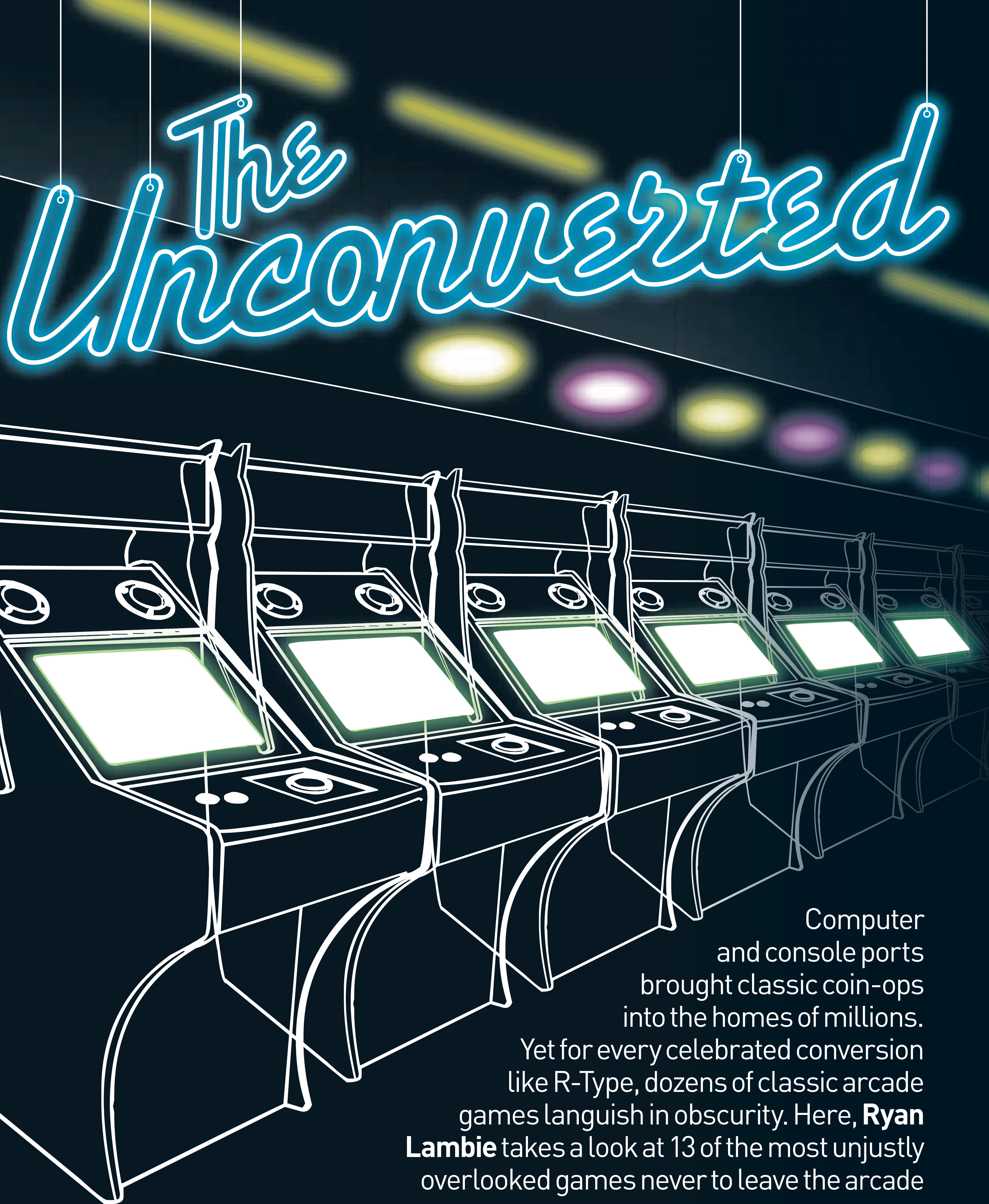
What we think

Uridium might seem a controversial choice for these pages, and it's fair to say that it today feels a little basic and at times unforgiving. But the gameplay mechanics are great, and the combination of fast-paced shooting/survival and considered, devious level design ensures *Uridium* a place among the C64's best blasters, regardless of its relatively minimal nature.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64
- **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
- **DEVELOPER:** ANDREW BRAYBROOK
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



The Unconverted

Computer and console ports brought classic coin-ops into the homes of millions. Yet for every celebrated conversion like R-Type, dozens of classic arcade games languish in obscurity. Here, **Ryan Lambie** takes a look at 13 of the most unjustly overlooked games never to leave the arcade





Mustache Boy

Seibu Kaihatsu, 1987

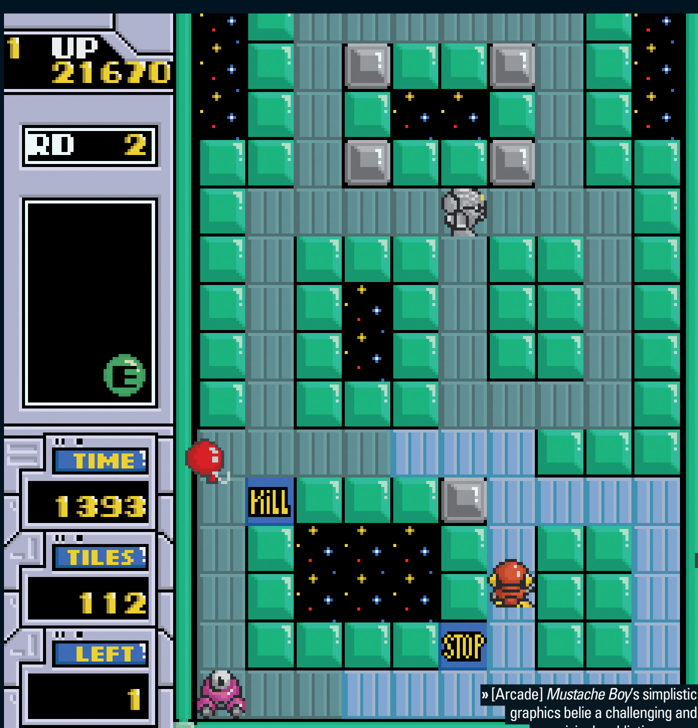
■ No, *Mustache Boy*'s title isn't some kind of mistranslation – this game really does star a boy with bushy facial hair, though who the unfortunate lad is and how he acquired his moustache is never explained.

Programmed by Seibu Kaihatsu three years before its superb shooter *Raiden*, *Mustache Boy* is essentially a top-down variation on *Q*Bert*. You control the eponymous hero, whose task is to step on every square on each level while avoiding the monsters that patrol them. Like *Pac-Man*'s ghosts, each monster has its own method of attack – some will roam the stage in a haze, while others will chase you relentlessly should you cross their line of sight. To redress the balance, there are a number of power-ups to collect. These range from explosives that take out any nasties within a one-square radius, to a giant fist that knocks enemies flat.

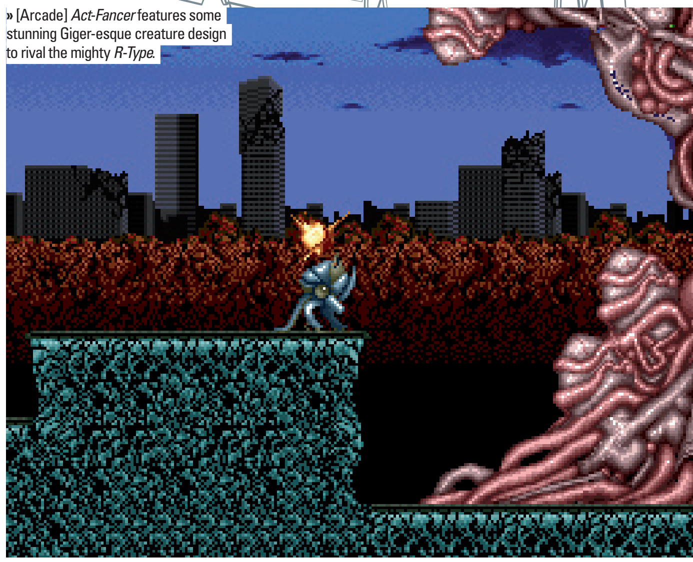
Mustache Boy's graphics are best described as functional – it's doubtful that they would have looked particularly impressive even in 1987, with characters only 16 pixels high and levels composed of little more than a few brightly coloured squares.

But while it's easy to smirk at *Mustache Boy*'s simplistic gameplay and dismiss it as just another Eighties retro curiosity, its steadily rising difficulty level and pixel-precise controls – which allow for death-defying jumps over chasms and avoiding marauding enemies with ease – make for an insidiously addictive experience. Later stages add to its appeal, becoming increasingly large and complex while adding extra challenges, including more enemies, bottomless pits and conveyor-belt-like tiles.

With a title – and central character – as quirky as *Mustache Boy* is, it's unsurprising that Seibu's arcade gem never saw much business outside Japan. But look beyond the curious personal grooming, and you'll discover a minor arcade classic.



» [Arcade] *Mustache Boy*'s simplistic graphics belie a challenging and surprisingly addictive game.



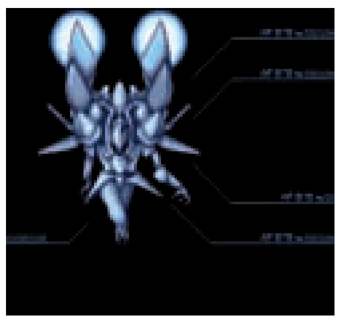
» [Arcade] *Act-Fancer* features some stunning Giger-esque creature design to rival the mighty *R-Type*.

Act-Fancer: Cybernetick Hyper Weapon

Data East, 1989

■ *Act-Fancer* is a side-scrolling run-and gun platformer, which, like Data East's 1987 shooter *Super Real Darwin*, features the interesting gimmick of a steadily evolving protagonist. With each glowing pill, your initially diminutive hero mutates into a bigger life form with increasingly destructive firepower; what begins as a tiny, chicken-like specimen eventually morphs into an upright, winged humanoid capable of multi-directional fire.

The look of *Act-Fancer*, while typical of many post-Eighties sci-fi shooters, is nevertheless highly distinctive. Handled by Torba, the same character designer responsible for other Data East hits such as *Karnov* and *Dragon Ninja*, *Act-Fancer*'s fleshy, HR Giger-influenced monsters and strange, stylised backgrounds are beautifully realised – the opening level, with its gigantic, demolished Greek statues, is particularly memorable.







Gorgeous visuals aside, *Act-Fancer* is one seriously tough game. Your character devolves if you don't keep collecting power-ups, and in his initial state he's perilously weak – take a hit and you're sent back to the beginning of the level. This against-the-clock tension is strangely offset by the need to pick slowly through each stage; rushing ahead always spells certain death. Nor is it possible to pay your way through the game by constantly throwing in credits – without a good memory and patience, it's unlikely that you'll even make it past the first boss. But for those who do persevere, *Act-Fancer* offers a wealth of alien horrors to discover, from level 3's army of insects to the genuinely nightmarish biomechanical creatures on level 5.

It's a sad fact that, despite *Your Sinclair*'s seal of approval – the magazine's Matt Bielby gave it a respectable 7 out of 10 convertability rating – *Act-Fancer* has all but disappeared into the mists of arcade history.

The Unconverted



» [Arcade] *Prehistoric Isle*'s multi-directional scrolling adds variety and a creeping sense of claustrophobia.



Prehistoric Isle In 1930

SNK, 1989

■ …or Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* seen through the filter of an Eighties horizontal shoot-'em-up. *Prehistoric Isle*'s 'investigate the Bermuda Triangle' opening story is but a flimsy excuse for an exotic, dinosaur-themed blaster that blends a Fifties B-movie's disregard for historical accuracy with no-frills late Eighties blasting.

Taking control of a flimsy red biplane, you fly over a leafy island populated by the cast of a Ray Harryhausen film, including prehistoric lizards, giant insects and kamikaze cavemen who will cling to your wings with all their strength. Power-ups are collected from floating eggs, and in a neat little riff on the *R-Type* weapon system, a collectable turret can be rotated around your plane to protect it from above, below or behind. This multi-directional firepower comes in handy, because *Prehistoric Isle* takes a particularly sadistic delight in abruptly changing the direction of its scrolling, with sudden dives into caves and waterfalls, or steep climbs up the sides of cliffs. The extreme agility of the isle's denizens – who fly and leap from all angles, intent on mangling your plane in their jaws – plus the scenery's cluttered outcroppings of fauna and rock, make this a particularly claustrophobic shooter, requiring careful memorisation of enemy patterns and stage layouts.

Prehistoric Isle's graphics, while not in the league of, say, *R-Type*, are distinctive and packed with charm, with dinosaur designs ranging from vaguely plausible – pterodactyls and brontosaurus, for example – to the completely insane, like level 3's floating whale beast thing.

In an era when shooters as dull as *P-47: The Phantom Fighter* were widely ported, it makes little sense why *Prehistoric Isle* wasn't also given the conversion treatment.





Carrier Air Wing

Capcom, 1990



» [Arcade] Improved Capcom hardware makes *Carrier Air Wing* even more visually impressive than its predecessor, *UN Squadron*.

■ When Capcom created *UN Squadron*, a side-scrolling shooter based on Kaoru Shintani's manga *Area 88*, the result was a classic. The anti-war message of the comic book may have been drowned out by the roar of gunfire and jet engines, but the game's blend of realistic aircraft and absurdly over-the-top weaponry places it high on the list of the Eighties' best shoot-'em-ups. Ported to home computers and, most successfully, the Super Nintendo, *UN Squadron*'s widespread popularity made a sequel inevitable.

That sequel arrived in 1990. *Carrier Air Wing* (*US Navy* in Japan) sadly lacks Shintani's distinctive designs, but the shooting action is strikingly similar. There's still the familiar choice of three aircraft and the same huge mechanised bosses and rapid, side-scrolling shooting action that favours reflexes over memorisation.

There is one subtle change, however: your fighter's energy bar now depletes even when you aren't hit, requiring constant topping up from the orbs dropped by vanquished enemies. This adds an extra note of tension to an already frantic game, and, if anything, *Carrier Air Wing*'s action is far more intense than *UN Squadron*, with fast-paced aerial dogfights among skyscrapers and lethal encounters in caves.

And while *Carrier Air Wing*'s core gameplay isn't spectacularly different from its predecessor, it's nevertheless full of neat graphical touches – cars flicked up like toys in the wake of your cannon, the ripple of water as you fly near the sea – and in many ways it's the superior game: enemy attack patterns are more varied, while area bosses and explosions are bigger and meatier.

Given the sheer number of ports that *UN Squadron* enjoyed, it's a mystery why this excellent shooter never received the attention of its illustrious forebear.

Aliens

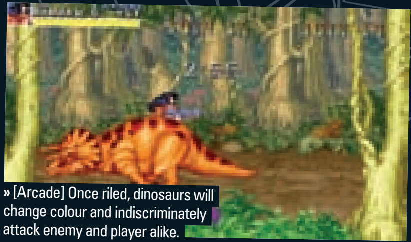
Konami, 1990





■ **RELEASED IN 1986**, *Aliens* was one of the decade's greatest sci-fi movies, and its success made an adaptation inevitable. Unusually, *Aliens* was treated to three tie-in games for home computers: Activision and Software Studios both released titles called *Aliens: The Computer Game* in 1987. Shortly after, Square created a Japan-only *Aliens* game for the MSX.

In 1990, Konami released an *Aliens* tie-in of its own, which took the form of a side-scrolling shooter. Unfortunately, it appears that Konami's programmers didn't bother to watch the movie before getting started; the game presents a blonde Sigourney Weaver battling through an army of creatures that have nothing to do with the film, including zombies, floating heads and pink aliens. Despite this lack of cinematic attention, *Aliens* remains a great scrolling blaster that really deserved a home conversion


» [Arcade] Once riled, dinosaurs will change colour and indiscriminately attack enemy and player alike.



Cadillacs And Dinosaurs

Capcom, 1992

■ Capcom may be better known these days for its seemingly endless *Resident Evil* and *Street Fighter* spin-offs and sequels, but back in the era when scrolling beat-'em-ups ruled the arcades, it produced masterpieces like *Final Fight* and, less famously, *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs*.

Based on the US comic of the same name, *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* is a three-player brawler with a pace and styling not unlike Sega's console hit *Streets Of Rage*. It features the usual roster of characters to choose from – three muscle-bound guys, and one buxom female – and eight levels of marauding thugs to bludgeon senseless. As the name suggests, its dinosaurs are its big gimmick: unapologetically huge beasts that attack both player and enemy with savage abandon.

Dinosaurs aside, *Cadillacs* is a fairly predictable Nineties beat-'em-up. There are the energy-sapping super moves to help you out in emergencies, the typical enemy names – Vice T, for example – and cringeworthy dialogue, plus the usual obsessions with bondage gear and hugely overweight enemies.

There's an impressive armoury, from basic blunt instruments to grin-inducing automatic firearms. The missile launcher is the best of the lot, capable of reducing enemies to a shower of eyeballs and gore. It's fun, and certainly polished, but isn't a patch on Capcom's superior D&D scrolling fighters.

Unfortunately, the gaming world was in the grip of *Street Fighter II* by the time *Cadillacs* arrived, and it's likely that by 1992 the scrolling fighter was considered a little long in the tooth. Nevertheless, *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* is worth rediscovering, not least for its gargantuan dinosaur sprites, impressive cache of weapons and relentless action.

Out Zone

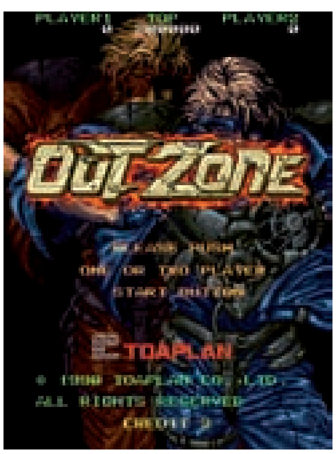
Toaplan, 1990

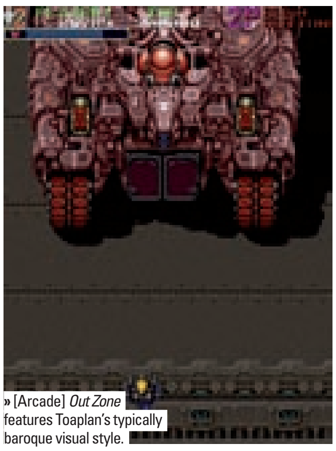
■ *Out Zone* is a top-down shooter in the style of *Commando* or *Mercs*, and marks a rare departure from the pure, air-based shooters that Toaplan was so famous for.

You control a cyborg soldier who, like *Commando*'s Super Joe, is dropped behind enemy lines to single-handedly take on an entire army.

Toaplan's distinctive visual stylings and music are immediately in evidence, with alien and tank designs to match its best works such as *Tatsujin* or *Fire Shark*. The way the terrain steadily transforms from lush jungle to a creepily alien stronghold as you progress is a long-standing Toaplan trademark, but its familiarity does little to dim the quality of design present here.

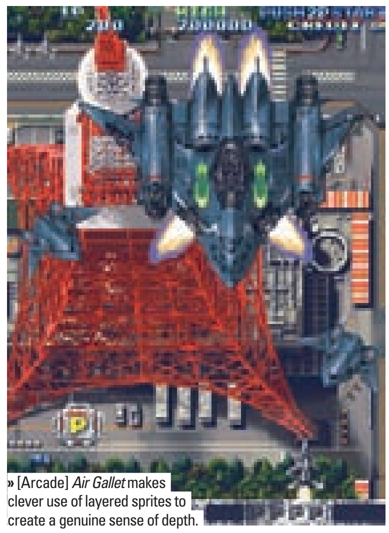
Like most Toaplan games, *Out Zone* is also extremely difficult. It displays a frustrating tendency to place you in tight spaces and bombard you with bullets, and attempting to defend yourself on narrow catwalks can become frustrating at times. Nevertheless, there are some neat ideas here, including an unusual power-up system where you can choose between fixed or multi-directional fire. Like *Carrier Air Wing*, your progress is made even more tricky by the inclusion of a steadily depleting energy bar, which must be constantly replenished by collecting energy boosts if you want to continue.




» [Arcade] *Out Zone* features Toaplan's typically baroque visual style.

No Toaplan blaster would be complete without a massive area boss at the end of each stage, and *Out Zone* is no exception; level 3's laser-wielding monstrosity, which cuts away great chunks of the scenery, is an especially challenging example. The end of each level says, 'You made it!', as though even the game can't quite believe you've survived.

Out Zone is arguably one of Toaplan's greatest shooters, and why it was never ported to home systems is one of retro gaming's great enigmas.


» [Arcade] *Air Gallet* makes clever use of layered sprites to create a genuine sense of depth.

Air Gallet

Gazelle, 1993

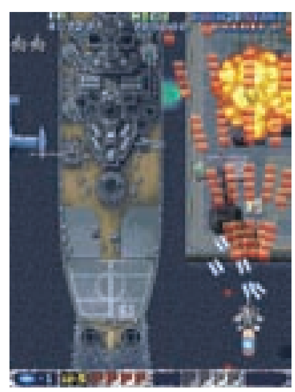
■ 2D shooters have always borrowed ideas off one another, and Gazelle's top-down blaster is no exception: at first glance, *Air Gallet*'s red jet fighter and power-up system bear an uncanny resemblance to Seibu Kaihatsu's 1990 shooter, *Raiden*.

There are some imaginative level designs amid all the familiarity, however; the first level's conclusion, which takes place in the crimson wake of a launching space shuttle, is surprising and impressively staged. Backgrounds are beautifully detailed to an almost insane degree, with bullet trains hurtling back and forth beneath you, and there are even some successful attempts at creating a sense of depth, with level 2 featuring a huge radio tower that looms up from the ground – it's a simple sprite-layering effect, but an extremely effective one.

Air Gallet also happens to be one of the most talkative games of the early Nineties. "*Air Gallet* blows your socks off!" the game's voiceover boldy states, and from then on almost every downed enemy, collected power-up and achievement is commented on, raved about or announced from a tannoy.

Power-ups are both gloriously destructive and glorious to behold, and the choice of two types of smart bomb – one focused and powerful, the other screen-wide yet weak – adds a hint of strategy amid the wanton destruction.

It's also difficult to remember a game more generous with its power-ups; the death of a larger enemy or mid-level boss results in a pinata-like shower of them. This generosity is fortunate, because *Air Gallet* assaults the player with great curtains of bullets from the first stage. Indeed, the difficulty level remains virtually horizontal from beginning to end, with the last area only slightly tougher to beat than the first. Nevertheless, *Air Gallet* is an intense, excellently crafted shooter.



The Unconverted

Bomb Jack Twin

NMK, 1993

■ Way back in the early Eighties, before Tecmo became synonymous with the swirling violence and bouncing bosoms of Tomonobu Itagaki, it created the simple yet addictive classic *Bomb Jack* under its original studio name of Tehkan.

While *Bomb Jack Twin*'s programming duties were handled by little-known studio NMK rather than Tecmo, the second sequel nevertheless takes the same basic gameplay from its 1984 predecessor. Like the original, *Twin*'s action plays out on single static screens, and remains a pleasingly demented fusion of platform game and *Pac-Man*, with the aim to collect all the bombs on each screen while avoiding the enemies guarding them. Extra points are earned by collecting them in a specific sequence, while grabbing tokens will immobilise enemies for a brief period. Clear the screen of bombs, and it's on to the next.

What's most striking about *Twin* is its blinding speed – this is *Bomb Jack* on amphetamines, with lightning-fast enemies that patrol every level's platforms and skies; for the unwary, it's possible to lose the game within seconds. But despite a difficulty level that seems intent on emptying your pocket of coins as quickly as possible, the addictive qualities of *Twin*'s predecessors survive intact.

A simultaneous two-player co-op mode – a feature that was sadly missing from the first game – adds to the fun, while extra bonus rounds and updated animation adds greater depth and humour to its tiny caped heroes.

It's unfortunate that *Bomb Jack Twin* never made the impact of its forebears, which appeared on the NES and 8-bit computers in the Eighties. It's possible that, by 1993, *Twin*'s retro gameplay seemed a little too simplistic to find a console audience, but, for fans of the first *Bomb Jack*, *Twin* is a more than worthy update of an incendiary Eighties classic.



» [Arcade] The same addictive *Bomb Jack* gameplay, but with a considerably faster pace.

Violent Storm

Konami, 1993

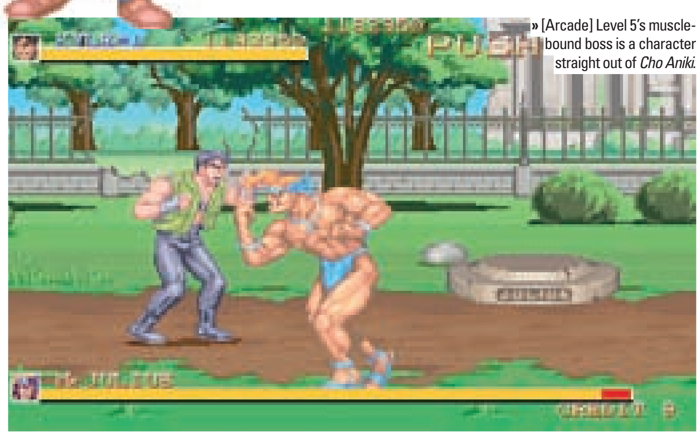
■ A scrolling beat-'em-up in the grand tradition of *Double Dragon* and *Final Fight*, *Violent Storm* was one of the few Konami fighters of its era not based on a licence. In terms of gameplay, it treads familiar territory, with three tough guys to choose from and a scrolling battlefield of goons to kick your way through.

A catchy slice of J-rock provides the soundtrack, and the whole game looks and sounds like a Saturday morning cartoon, with colourful characters and plenty of floppy fringes. The predictable beat-'em-up caricatures are trotted out – no brawler would be complete without a miniskirt-wearing bondage chick, after all – but this is easily forgivable thanks to its anarchic sense of humour. Where most beat-'em-ups attempted to create a gritty urban atmosphere inspired by movies such as *The Warriors*, Konami took a more slapstick approach: few other games draw attention to their enemies' dim AI as *Violent Storm* does, with these idiots constantly blowing themselves up or falling off speeding trains. The weapons provide similar moments of weirdness, including one instance where you can pulverise enemies with a rugby ball made from a roaming piglet.



In fact, *Violent Storm* rivals *Metal Slug* for moments of sheer strangeness, and, by the stage 5 boss – a statue that transforms into a body builder wearing a thong – things are becoming very weird indeed.

Admittedly, the gameplay can become repetitive – you're essentially fighting the same dozen sprites over and over again – but this is by no means an atypical flaw in the era's fighting games, and *Violent Storm* ranks among Konami's best offerings.



» [Arcade] Level 5's muscle-bound boss is a character straight out of *Cho Aniki*.



» [Arcade] This musical area boss pays homage to the classic *Parasol Stars*.

Bubble Memories: The Story Of Bubble Bobble 3

Taito, 1995

■ Taito returns to the classic and highly addictive static-screen gameplay of the original *Bubble Bobble* with *Bubble Memories*, which takes series protagonists Bub and Bob to their original dinosaur guises. And thanks to the superior processing power of the mid-Nineties, the gameplay is more manic than ever; the reptilian heroes can move more quickly and blow more bubbles at a time, and the game as a whole is much faster paced than the original.

There's even the vaguest whiff of *R-Type* about this outing, with an extended press of the fire button creating a huge super bubble that can capture larger foes – or several smaller ones – for extra points.

Bubble Memories plays like a loving homage to all the *Bubble Bobble* games that came before it, with classic enemies from as far back as 1983's *Chack'n Pop* making a welcome reappearance. There are also references to *Rainbow Islands* with that game's treasure chests and power-ups; musical notes and demented instruments from *Parasol Stars*; plus big end-of-level bosses that have long been a series feature.

Taito pulled off a tricky balancing act with *Bubble Memories*; it remains faithful to the spirit of the original while introducing new, engaging ideas of its own. The two-player co-op gameplay is as addictive as ever, while the increased variety of enemies and obstacles provide unexpected challenges to long-standing Taito fans.

Despite the mystifying inclusion of some frankly ugly digitised backdrops, and some infuriating credit-gobbling later stages – which the original *Bubble Bobble*, classic though it is, also contains – *Bubble Memories* is a more than worthy entry in the *Bobble* canon, and joins *Parasol Stars* as one of the series' most sorely neglected instalments.

Puzzle Uo Poko

Cave, 1998



■ A rare vaunt into puzzle game territory for Cave, a developer more commonly associated with bullet hell shoot-'em-ups, *Uo Poko* is a cross between the colour-match gameplay of *Puzzle Bobble* and the physics of pinball.

Operated with the press of a single button, you must launch like-coloured spheres into the play area. The system works like the spring-loaded plunger on a pinball machine – the longer the button is held, the further the ball will go. But despite this lack of direct aiming, it's surprising just how intuitive *Uo Poko*'s control system is, and how little time it takes to learn.

Otherwise, *Uo Poko* plays like a standard action puzzler, with increasingly intricate patterns of coloured spheres to match and clear, and a gradually tightening time limit that sees the play area decrease in size each time you make a mistake. There are bonuses rewarded for chain reactions, and later stages introduce new types of sphere; some must be shattered, while others are indestructible.

There's a strange nautical theme – it has something to do with cats exploring the ocean in a submarine – which adds plenty of whimsical charm but does little to enhance the gameplay.

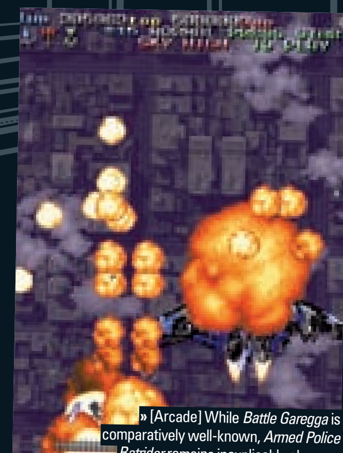
You could argue that *Uo Poko* feels a little too familiar, and borrows a few too many ideas from games like *Columns* and *Puzzle Bobble*, but *Uo Poko*'s real masterstroke lies in its excellent two-player co-op mode. This presents players with an entirely new set of levels where careful co-ordination and communication is required to complete each stage.

Ultimately, *Uo Poko* is a charming, addictive puzzler, with one of the most engaging two-player modes in any game of its type – and it's a game crying out for a conversion to the DS or iPhone.



» [Arcade] Like the best puzzle games, *Uo Poko*'s control system is easy to master.





» [Arcade] While *Battle Garegga* is comparatively well-known, *Armed Police Batrider* remains inexplicably obscure.

Armed Police Batrider

Eighting, 1998

■ When legendary shoot-'em-up developer Toaplan closed in 1994, its design and programming talent dispersed and formed new studios of their own. As the Nineties drew to a close, these studios – Cave, Gazelle, Takumi and Eighting (also known as Raizing) – began what appeared to be a kind of shoot-'em-up arms race, with each team creating a vertically scrolling blaster more tough and outlandish than the last.

Eighting's *Armed Police Batrider* is one of the studio's masterpieces of barely contained chaos. A vertical shooter firmly rooted in the danmaku (or 'bullet curtain') subgenre, *Batrider* could be seen as the studio's answer to Cave's equally mental *DoDonPachi*, released the year before. Like *DoDonPachi*, *Batrider* pushes the player's skills and reaction times to the limit, and delights in absurdly powerful weaponry, gigantic area bosses and gleeful amounts of public property damage.

It's clear from the first few seconds of play that *Batrider* isn't for the uninitiated, and it's possible that the sheer number of bullets – both friendly and otherwise – as well as enemy formations and explosions that occur at any given moment, will induce a kind of sensory overload in all but the most dedicated fans. Those steeped in Toaplan's output, meanwhile, will recognise the numerous references and ship cameos that constantly pop up, and in this regard *Batrider* is shoot-'em-up gold.

There's also a warped sense of humour evident in the array of characters to choose from, which range from jet bikes to a man on a flying carpet. With its spectacular music, visuals and a level of difficulty to rival every shooter of the period, it's unfortunate that *Batrider* didn't receive the conversions that *DoDonPachi* or *Battle Garegga* enjoyed, for this ranks as one of Eighting's best, and deserves to be rediscovered.

Digital Downloads



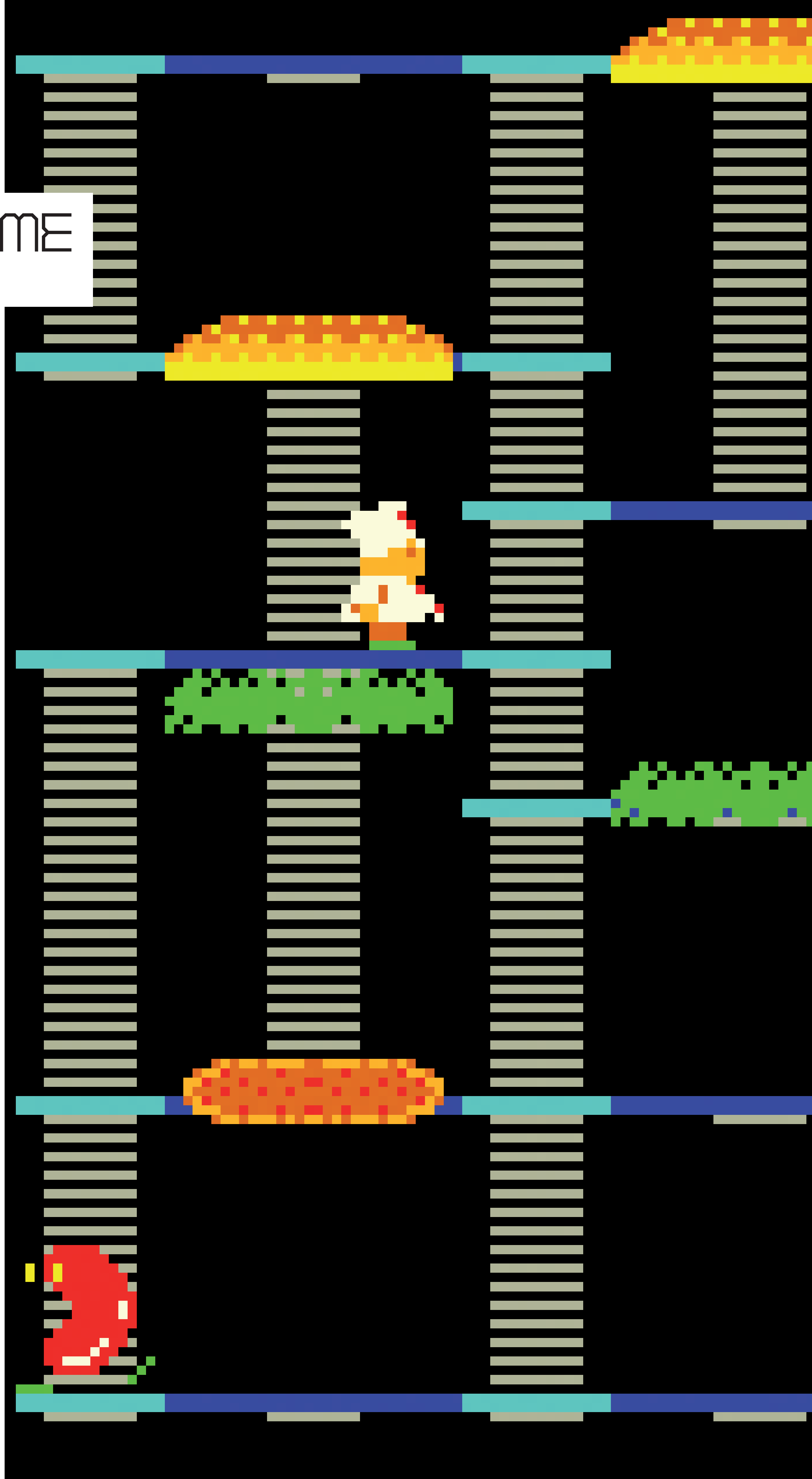
» [Wii] Japan's Virtual Console Arcade on the Wii boasts a wealth of obscure arcade titles, including *Rompers* and *Knuckle Heads*.

■ **THE 13 GAMES** featured here represent only a small fraction of the hundreds of arcade machines that lie forgotten. In some cases, even the studios that made them appear to have erased their existence from memory – Taito failed to include the excellent *Bubble Memories* on either of its *Taito Legends* retro compilations; neither *Carrier Air Wing* nor *Cadillacs And Dinosaurs* were included on any of Capcom's collections; and Data East appears to have forgotten all about the unfairly neglected *Act-Fancer* for its recently announced *Arcade Classics*.

But with the advent of digital download services such as the Wii's Virtual Console, there is at least a small chance that some of these neglected games could make an unexpected comeback. In Japan, Namco has made a number of obscure titles from its back catalogue available for the Wii's download service, including the farm-themed maze game *Rompers* and one-on-one fighter *Knuckle Heads*.

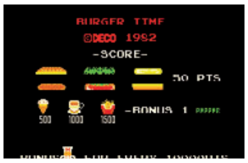
Sadly, the system's European counterpart only hosts a fraction of the games available in Japan. But who knows? Forgotten classics like *Armed Police Batrider* or *Prehistoric Isle* could be coming soon.



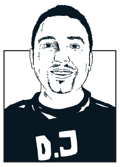


BURGER TIME

NOW THAT'S SOME FAST FOOD



- **PUBLISHER:** DATA EAST
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £100+



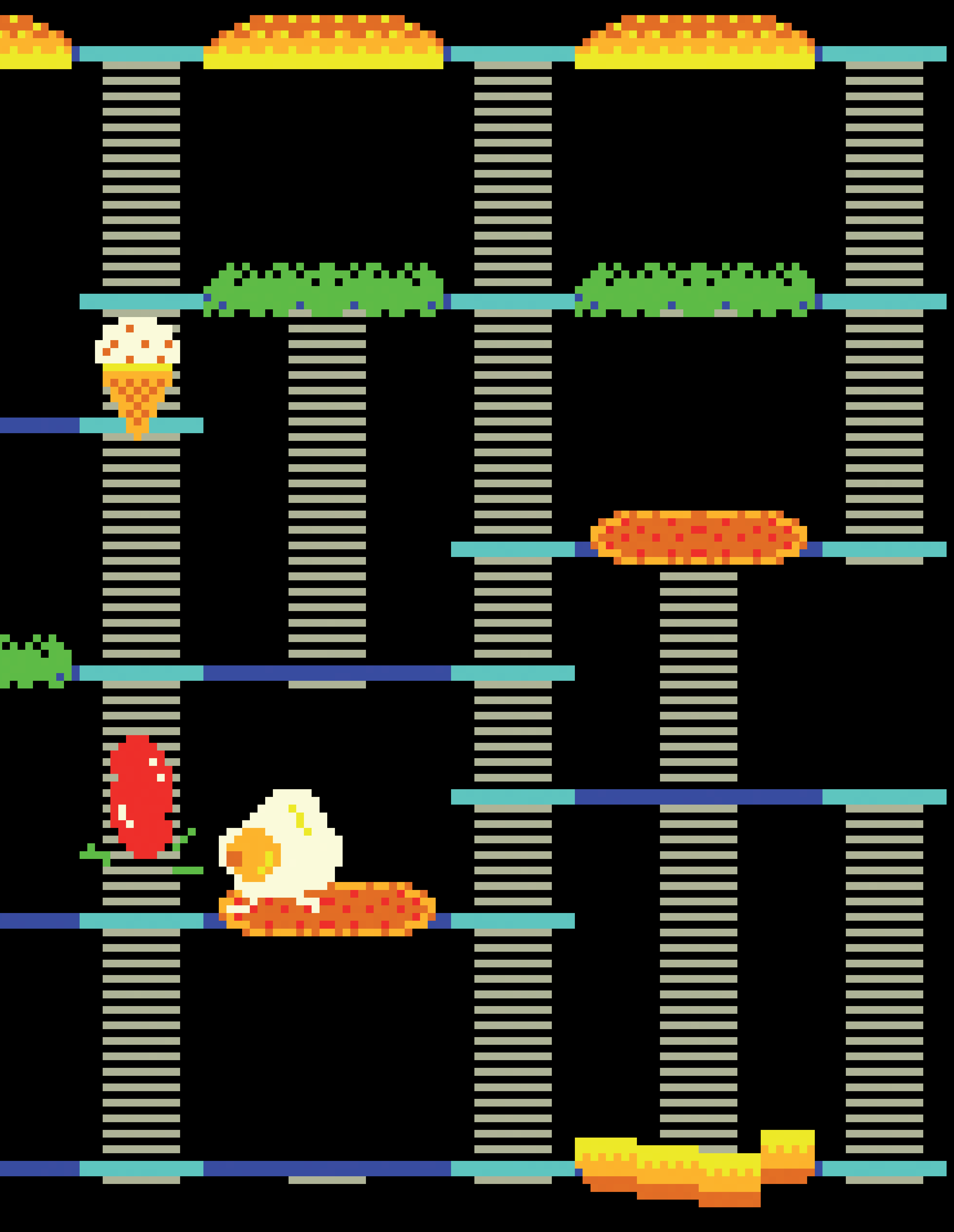
HISTORY

Nowadays it's rare to find a videogame based around a job, but back in the Eighties it was happening all the time. Gamers could take on the role of a dustbin man in *Trashman,* deliver newspapers in *Paperboy,* or even serve drinks in *Tapper.* One of my personal favourites from back in the day, though, was taking on the role of Pepper Pete in Data East's wonderful *Burger Time.*

Cast in the plump form of Pete, you're required to race up and down each screen's many platforms and make a set number of burgers. Unfortunately for Pete, the ingredients are scattered throughout each stage, meaning plenty of running back and forth in order to create his delicious snacks.

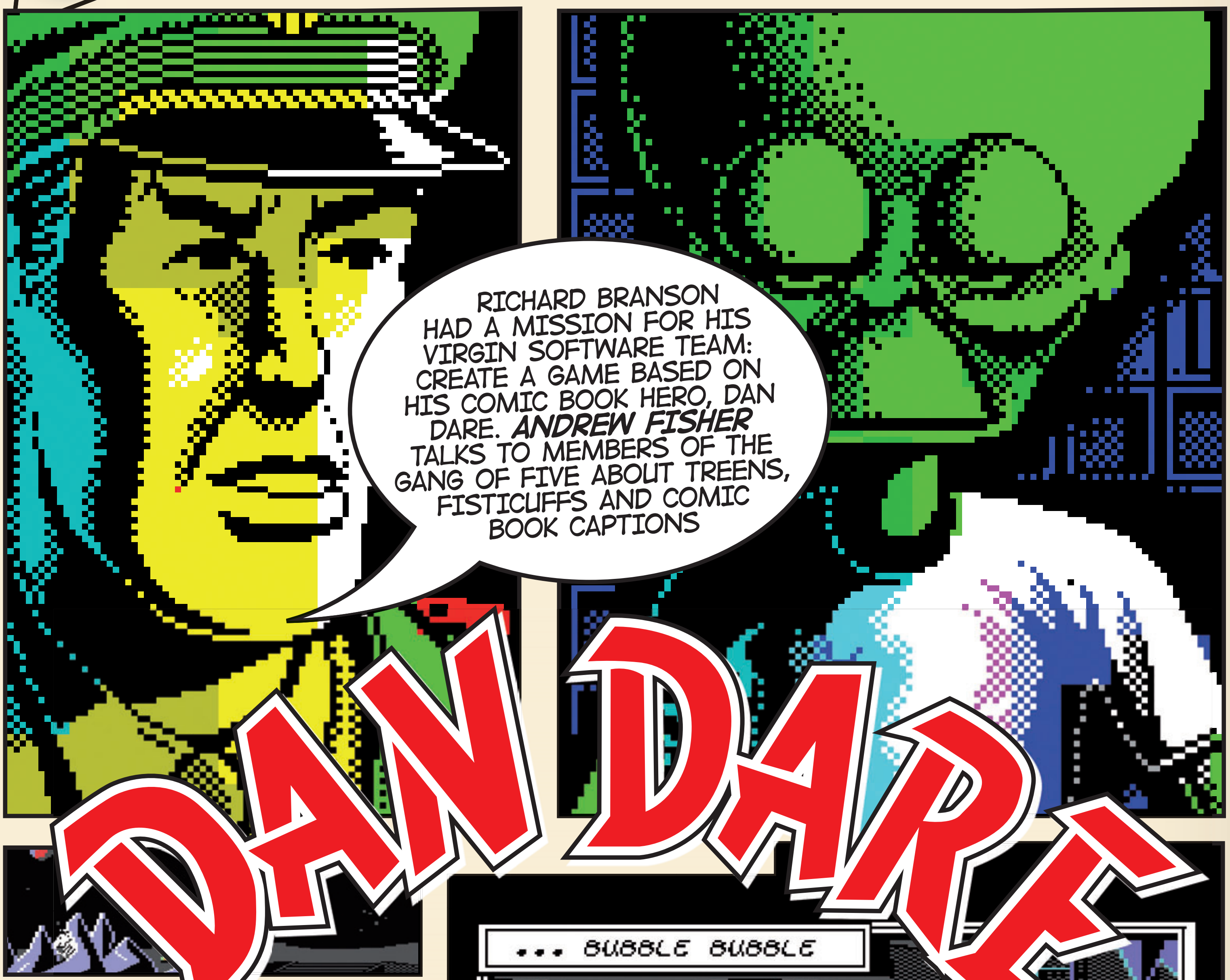
Walk across an ingredient and it will drop down a stage, instantly knocking any other ingredients beneath it down a level as well. Once each burger is finished off, you can move on to the next screen. Pete's task sounds relatively straightforward, but he's constantly hounded by a variety of other foodstuffs, which can be temporarily thwarted with a quick dash of pepper. Give them a liberal dose and they'll be held in place for a few precious seconds, allowing Pete to attempt an escape. Sadly, though, Pete only has a finite number of pepper doses, so sprinkling without a care in the world isn't going to help your cause at all.

Upon realising that you only have a limited amount of ammo to deal with your opponents, *Burger Time* becomes a hectic chase through each single-screen stage, with the portly chef constantly trying to finish off his burgers while avoiding all the deadly ingredients. It makes for a tremendously satisfying experience, as you're continually working out the best way of finishing off your burgers while working out how best to navigate each stage. Needless to say, you'll need both fast thinking and cat-like reflexes if you ever hope to see *Burger Time*'s later stages, which still completely elude me.

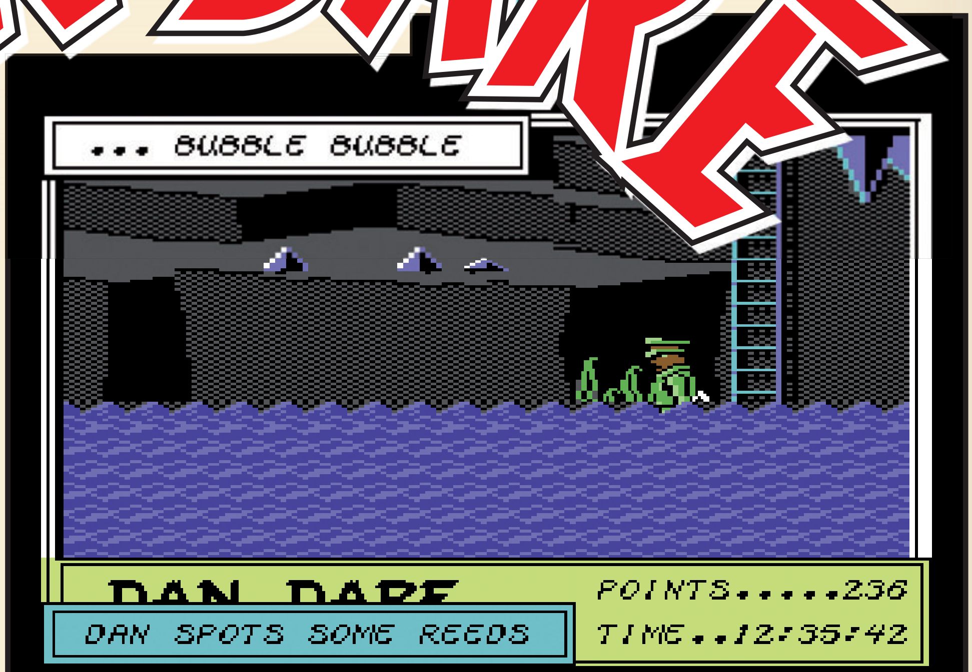


THE MAKING OF...

DAN DARE



RICHARD BRANSON HAD A MISSION FOR HIS VIRGIN SOFTWARE TEAM: CREATE A GAME BASED ON HIS COMIC BOOK HERO, DAN DARE. ***ANDREW FISHER*** TALKS TO MEMBERS OF THE GANG OF FIVE ABOUT TREENS, FISTICUFFS AND COMIC BOOK CAPTIONS



[C64] THE COMIC BOOK PANELS GIVE *DAN DARE* GREAT AUTHENTICITY

Andy Wilson, programmer and designer, looks back. "I remember getting quite excited when the boss walked into the office and said we'd got the rights to a *Dan Dare* game. I went to Forbidden Planet the next day to get some of the collected books for inspiration." *Dan Dare* was undergoing his second revival – the first being part of the original *2000 AD* – in the early Eighties, but it was the Fifties character as drawn by Frank Hampson that inspired the look of the game. Sadly, Hampson died in July 1985, and the manual had a short dedication to him. "We hope that he would have approved of our treatment of his characters," adds Wilson.

The Gang of Five was Virgin's in-house team: Andy Wilson, Dave Chapman, Ian Mathias, Steve Webb and Patricia Mitchell. "We were using

Compunet and Micronet quite a lot and needed a snappy name, so Gang of Five it was," explains Wilson. Other people who worked with the group included Simon Birrell and Martin Wheeler.

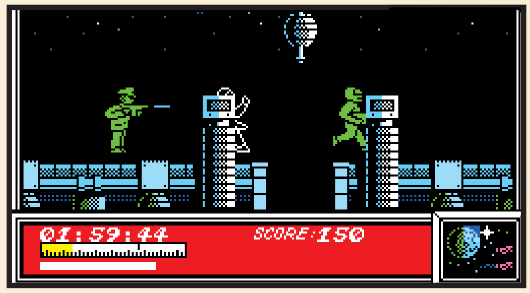
The Mekon had set an asteroid on a collision course with Earth and Dan had to activate its self-destruct mechanism. *C&VG* dedicated its cover to the game's preview, but the first level mentioned – Dan capturing and disabling satellites before landing on the asteroid – was missing from the finished game, since it would have required an extra load. "It just didn't work," says Wilson. "There were some nice touches and I was sorry to see it go, but it wasn't up to the quality of the rest of the game." Martin Wheeler adds: "There's only so much you can squeeze into 48K in the end! I think it's worth remembering that the whole game took up less space than a single JPEG does today."

The Spectrum and Amstrad got a fairly standard platform and ladders game – the ladders were replaced with 'gravchutes' – and Dan shooting Treens with a laser. Wheeler says: "The game mission was actually influenced by the film *Alien*. We took the idea of self-destructing a spaceship by inserting keys into a device and we spread the keys around a bit. It was a mechanic we could repeat on each level: find the key, take it back to the bomb room, and when you have inserted all five… get the hell out! Porting from C64 to Spectrum wasn't straightforward and would have been a compromise; to get the best results from a machine you have to code specifically for that machine. We eventually created two different games, developing them in tandem and sharing ideas, competing with each other to innovate. In all this, there was no master plan. I don't think I saw a single design document during the whole time I worked at Virgin. We simply made games."

The C64 game had more arcade adventure overtones, with Dan using objects, fighting the Treens with his fists, destroying the Mekon with grenades and escaping before the asteroid blew up. Dan also had the help of an alien pet named Stripey, and had to rescue his colleagues Digby and Professor Peabody. On the creation of the puzzles, Wilson says: "[I] really wanted to use classic solutions like knotting together the vines and breathing through a reed, so I guess in a lot of cases I thought of the solution then the puzzles."

When Dan encountered an object, pushing fire and a direction would give various options as a caption over the picture and then a speech bubble would explain the outcome. "I always hated having to press keys when playing games. The restriction of a single-button non-analogue joystick really made me think of how I could use it to do everything. In the end, that's probably the part of the game I was proudest of," Wilson continues.

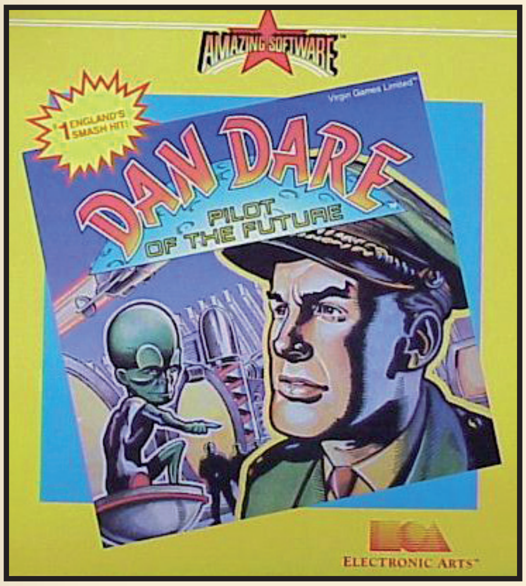
The laser-reflecting sub-game is perhaps the most memorable part. Dan must guide the beam through a series of movable reflectors to gain access to the Mekon's lair. "We'd been playing

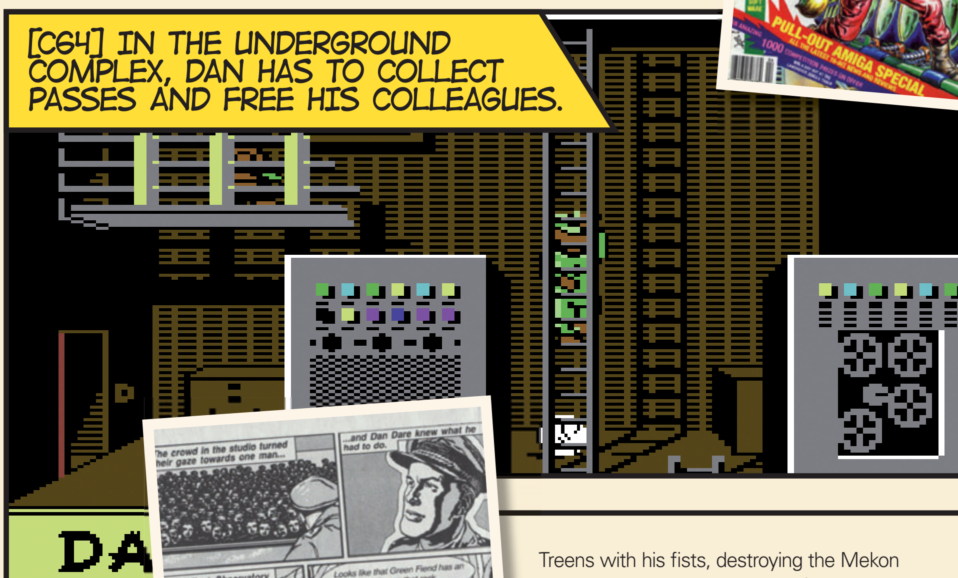


IN THE KNOW

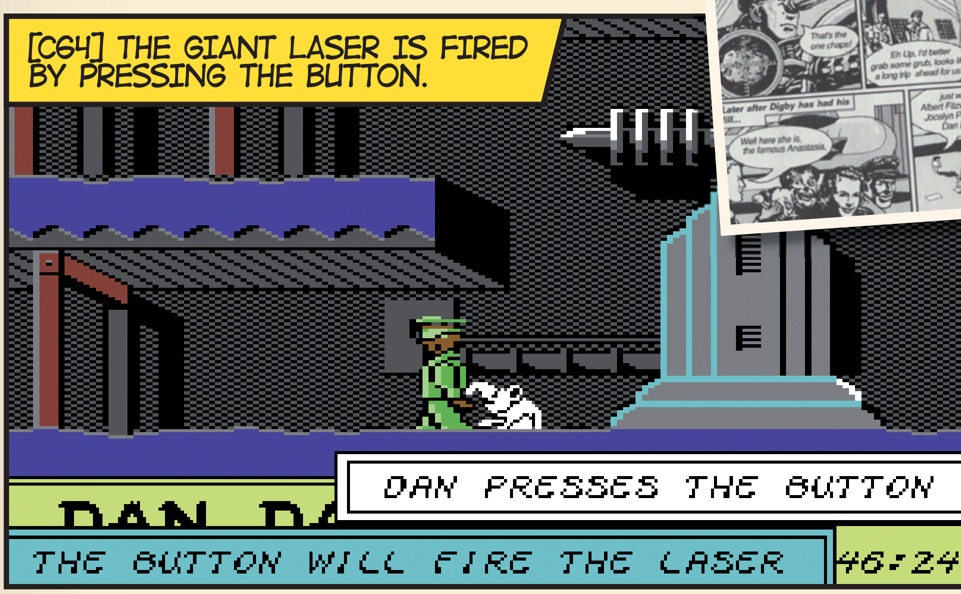
- **» PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN SOFTWARE
- **» DEVELOPER:** GANG OF FIVE
- **» PLATFORM:** C64, SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD
- **» RELEASED:** DAN DARE (1986), DAN DARE II (1987), DAN DARE III (1990)
- **» GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £1-£3






[C64] IN THE UNDERGROUND COMPLEX, DAN HAS TO COLLECT PASSES AND FREE HIS COLLEAGUES.





[C64] THE GIANT LASER IS FIRED BY PRESSING THE BUTTON.

[MAKING OF]... [DAN] DARE



some old puzzle games in the office – the kind where you have to turn wheels to make a ball go the right way – and I had the idea of trying a similar thing over multiple screens," explains Wilson. "By modern standards it's quite simple, but I don't think I'd seen anything like that at the time."

Graphic artist Ian Mathias came up with the comic book style of 'framing' the action and overlaying captions. "Ian did a great job," says Wilson. "There were a couple of technical issues with using multiple character sets but nothing show-stopping. In early versions the screen would scroll between frames, but when we tested it we found that didn't really work – it was too obtrusive." Wheeler also took influences from the comic for the Spectrum graphics: "After reading Hampson's 'The Man From Nowhere', I changed the style completely, adding lots of reds and yellows and opting for a more retro, almost steampunk feel."

"I tried to stay as faithful to the comic as possible," continues Wilson. "I didn't really want to do the obvious thing of Dan running around with a ray gun shooting Treens. That just wasn't the Dan Dare I remembered as a kid. The character was always much more thoughtful. Stripey was a character in the original comic, although he looked quite different – more like a tapir. After Ian redesigned him to fit in a square sprite he became more kangaroo-like, hence the bounciness." The 'fisticuffs' style of fighting the Treens had another source of inspiration: "We'd been playing *Way Of The Exploding Fist* in the office quite a bit, so the idea of a mini fighting game had a lot of appeal."

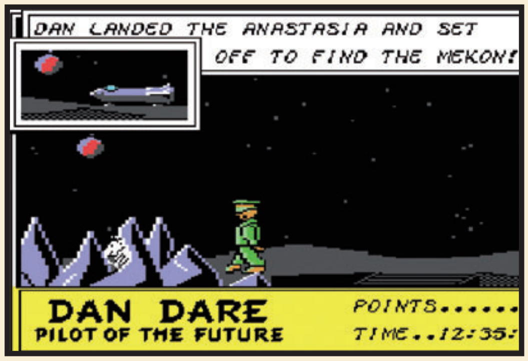
Simon Birrell echoes the sentiment: "Andy was adamant that there shouldn't be guns, as this wouldn't be faithful to the nature of the comic. I think Andy was extremely inventive. That level with the torch effect was amazing – that hadn't been done before." But this attention to detail took its toll. Wilson says: "As well as the abandoned first section there were a lot of ideas that I started coding but then realised they weren't even possible. Some things like the torch effect in the cave took a silly amount of time given the amount of gameplay they provided, but I like to think it was worth it."

Birrell recalls: "Andy started it sometime during the first half of 1985. He had just finished *Sorcery* on the C64, which had taken a while. I was doing my 'year off' at Virgin at the time, writing the C64 version of *Strangeloop*. When I came back to do a summer job in 1986, he was still working on it."

The Spectrum version was started later and took less time, according to Wheeler: "[It took] about four months, though it might have been longer if the time Dave Chapman spent writing sprite and level editors is included. The best moment for me was when a reviewer from *C&VG* came to preview the game and had to be told that he was actually viewing a Spectrum game. He did a little double take, looking down at the keyboard and then following the cable to the monitor. It's hard to imagine nowadays, that something so low-res once amazed people. But that was 1986."

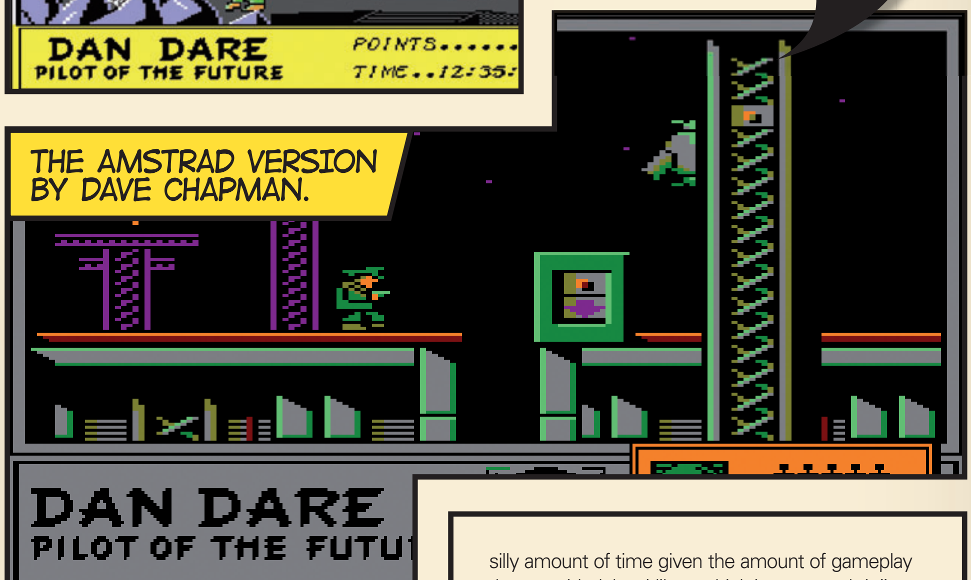
Graham Marsh, known on Compunet as the Mighty Bogg, was drafted in to help with the C64 music: "I received a phone call from one of the



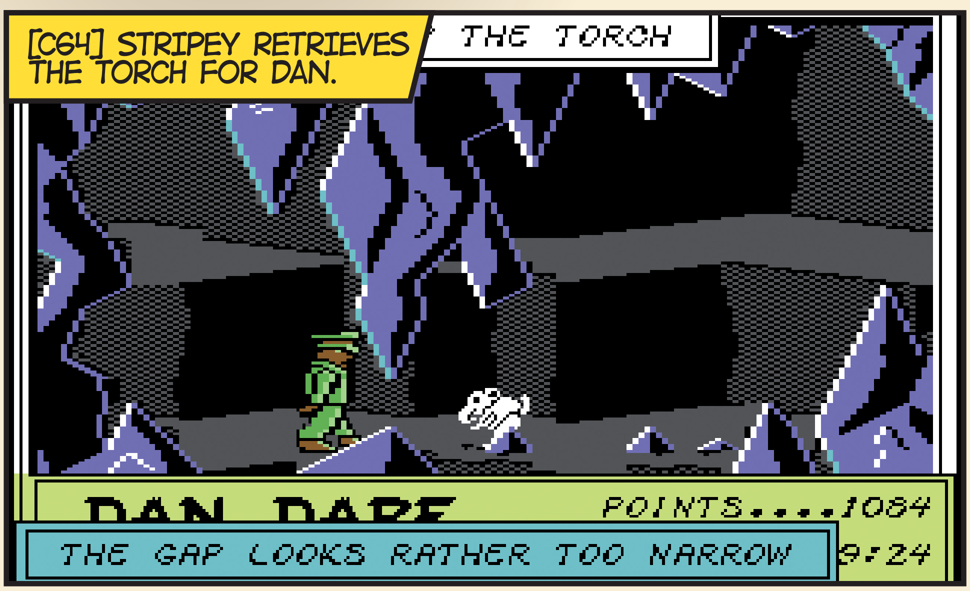


TRILOGY OF ERROR

THE THIRD GAME in the *Dan Dare* trilogy, subtitled '*The Escape*', had an unusual birth. David Perry and Nick Bruty were working on a Spectrum game for Probe entitled *Crazy Jet Racer*, and late in development the main character was switched to become Dan Dare and Virgin became the publisher. In the first section, Dare had to search a scrolling level for rocket fuel. Having found it, he could teleport into space, and cash earned from killing enemies could be spent on upgrades. Probe produced versions for the Amiga and Atari ST; the only 16-bit *Dan Dare* games. Nick Jones, a former colleague of Perry's at Mikro-Gen, was responsible for the C64 conversion. It was a case of shiny graphics and sound hiding repetitive gameplay, however, and it got the lowest review scores of the three games. The release date was 14 April 1990 – the 40th anniversary of Dan's first appearance in *Eagle*.



THE AMSTRAD VERSION BY DAVE CHAPMAN.



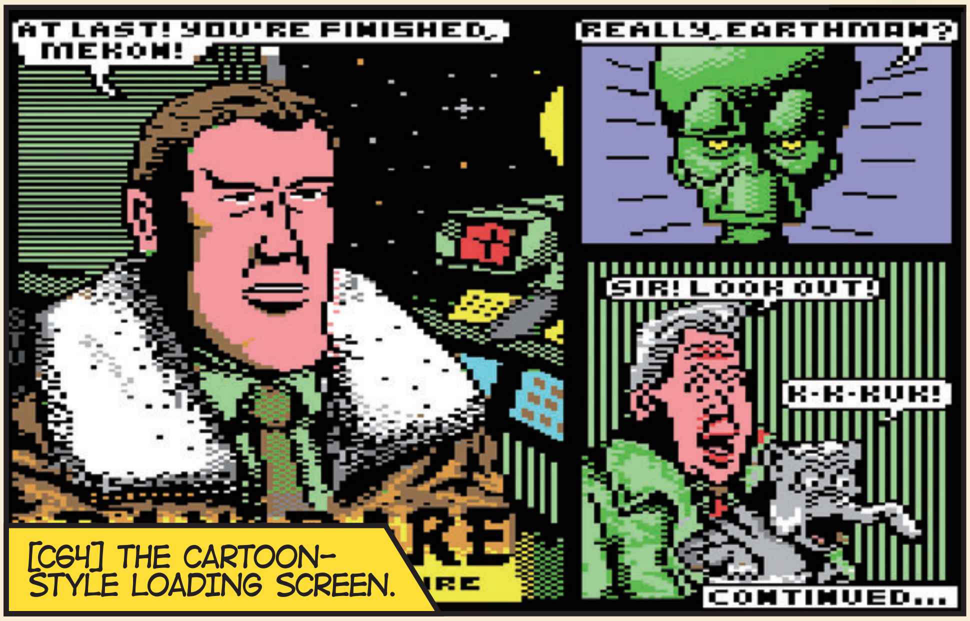
[C64] STRIPEY RETRIEVES THE TORCH FOR DAN.

programmers at Virgin, who said he had a basic melody for the game, and could I jazz it up a bit. I received a cassette in the post, which had a single-note melody played on a keyboard. I had to construct a chord sequence to back up this melody. I didn't write the actual tune; I just expanded it to three voices and gave it a chord structure and some twiddly bits." That basic melody was written by Chris Blackwell and appears in the game during pause mode. Marsh never met the team and received a modest cheque for his involvement, and was not approached to work on the sequel.

Gang of Five was responsible for *Dan Dare II: Mekon's Revenge*, with a unique gameplay twist: the player could be either Dan or the Mekon; Dan had to find and destroy the Supertreens in their breeding chambers, while the Mekon had to release them. Wheeler designed the graphics and levels, programmed on the Spectrum by new gang member Andy Green. "The first game was a tough act to follow and the option to play the Mekon was added to increase the game's replay value – one of the few criticisms of the original," says Wheeler. "Andy wanted to totally rewire the first game, not just to make a clone – even down to changing the mechanics by having Dan flying about on a jet bike. The level of challenge was powered up a notch by giving every section of the spaceship its own self-destruct sequence. If you make it through the airlock before the time runs out, there is a flash on the other side of the door and the completed section is vaporised, leaving only stars and the blackness of space beyond. There were trash compactors to crush you, gravity fields to push you around and life-support capsules containing Mekon clones for Dan to abort without conscience. It worked for us, but I think some people found the game a little too hardcore."

The third game in the series had nothing to do with the Gang of Five (see 'Trilogy of Error'), so what happened to the team? Birrell says: "Steve Webb walked out one day after a change in management. Ian became a manager at Virgin. Patricia went to Palace Software, where she eventually hired both Dave Chapman and myself. After Patricia left, I ran development at Palace until it got absorbed by Titus and then folded. I worked on plenty of unfinished games! In 1992 I moved to Spain and got involved with virtual reality and the internet. I've produced web-based games over the years for various clients, but am no longer part of the games industry. Like rock and roll, it's for the young!" Andy Green is now in Australia, still making games. Martin Wheeler has gone in a different direction: "Since designing *Warlocked* (Game Boy Color, 2000), most of my time has been spent as a music producer, and I've released three solo electronic albums as Vector Lovers. I'm currently developing projects in both music and iPhone apps, including the game *Red Planet*."

Andy Wilson is no longer in the industry: "I miss it sometimes when I'm sitting in a meeting discussing the best way to implement a web application for some investment bank or advertising agency." His last work was on the unfinished *Monster Museum*, recently found by the Games That Weren't website. Simon Birrell says: "*Monster Museum* was way ahead of its time. It's about the daughter of an archaeologist trapped in a museum, fighting with mummies and other monsters. Just like Lara Croft, but it predates her by several years! In those days there wasn't a game designer separate from the programmer, and in that sense I think [Wilson] was just too early. If he had been dedicated solely to the design of the game and worked with another programmer, he could have been a superstar."



[C64] THE CARTOON-STYLE LOADING SCREEN.

REBEL YELL

THE LASER-REFLECTING sub-game of C64 *Dan Dare* became the basis for Gang of Five's game *Rebel* at the suggestion of Ian Mathias. Set in the future, agricultural worker THX2240 steals a tank and tries to escape the compound she worked in. The ten levels were separated by giant doors, which could only be destroyed by reflecting the beam of a giant laser. THX's tank could move and turn the portable mirrors to create a pathway to the exit door. When the beam was fired, making a mistake in its path would cost a life. Enemy tanks, helicopters and planes attempted to stop THX, with repeated damage reducing the droid's functions.





[C64] THE LOADING SCREEN FROM THE SECOND GAME.



COLEC
VISIO





From the same company that would inflict the Cabbage Patch Kids upon the world, the ColecoVision entered an industry on the verge of collapse. **Damien McFerran** speaks to the man behind the machine that could have ruled the world

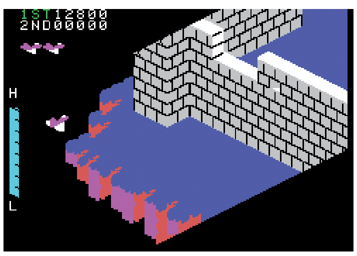
There are some striking similarities between the ColecoVision and Sony's all-conquering PlayStation. Both machines were released by companies that nominally operated outside the videogame industry – Coleco began life as Connecticut Leather Company before moving into children's toys, and Sony was, and still is, a purveyor of consumer electronics, movies and music. Both platforms were also more powerful than their closest competitors and relied heavily on third-party licences, with Coleco signing up some of the best arcade titles of the era, while Sony secured victory with the assistance of talented studios such as Namco, Square and Konami. However, it's there that the similarity ends: while the PlayStation went on to dominate the 32-bit era, the ColecoVision's potential was stymied by the videogame crash of the Eighties – a cataclysmic event brought on by market leader Atari's poor business strategy.

The ColecoVision hardware was the brainchild of Eric Bromley, a talented designer and engineer who had previously headed up R&D divisions within various coin-op firms, the most notable of which was Midway. He was in between jobs when Coleco's Mel Gershman asked him to come in for an interview. "He hired me within 15 minutes of my arrival," beams Bromley today. Coleco's output at that time was mostly electronic toys and play equipment, the former being something that caught Bromley's eye. "Coleco made one of my all-time favourite games: Rod Hockey," he explains. "They also made swimming pools, Holly Hobbie ovens, girl's playhouses, and various types of snow-riding items." However, with videogame sales booming and millions of dollars up for grabs, Coleco was looking to enter the market with its own home machine; the company knew the potential because it had already tentatively dipped a toe in the water during the Seventies with a range of handhelds and a simplistic TV game.

"The game with which we had our initial success was Telstar, which was promoted in 1976 as the first arcade home videogame under $100," says Bromley. The talented designer had an even grander vision in mind, but bringing it to fruition was difficult. "Coleco CEO Arnold Greenberg and I desperately wanted to make an arcade-quality, cartridge-programmable videogame," states Bromley. "I had started to do the preliminary design and costing for the ColecoVision three years – maybe even more – before its debut in 1982, but it was always shot down as too costly. Marketing a product at a magical retail price point was the key to everything Coleco produced; it was their mantra. Our team had developed a design around a Texas Instruments video chip and a sound chip from General Instruments, but it was RAM-intensive and therefore way above the cost limits." With the profit margin being the deciding factor, the situation remained static until 1981. "I picked up a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* and saw an article about how the cost of RAM had declined," explains Bromley. "I retrieved the latest cost analysis and substituted the new pricing. It came very close to the target price point. I ran to inform Arnold Greenberg and burst into his office without even asking his secretary; before he could react I showed him the new figures. Ten minutes later we were working on a new project with the working name 'ColecoVision'. We were going to find a really good name for it as soon as we could show something to our sales and marketing people." They never came up with a new moniker, and the working title stuck.

With the financial resources in place to make his dream a reality, Bromley set about engineering what would be considered the most powerful gaming machine of the period. "The key to the ColecoVision was that this was the first home videogame that could display





» By picking up cutting-edge titles such as *Zaxxon*, Coleco was making a bold statement about the ColecoVision.

and update the entire screen at almost arcade resolution, which in 1982 was 256x192 pixels, and at the same time move objects around at a speed that would test the hand-eye co-ordination of teenagers," he comments. "In order to do that, we needed to employ an array of RAM chips, which could create a graphic matrix, which was then sent out to the TV. Texas Instruments' chip was extremely clever – it could move a limited number of foreground objects very rapidly on a second layer over the background without redrawing the entire screen. Both layers required RAM, but with cheaper RAM we could produce arcade-quality games rendered by a console that could be sold to retailers for under $130."

Bromley was the perfect person to tackle such a project because he was a keen arcade gamer himself and instinctively knew what was required to replicate the thrills generated by cutting-edge coin-op hardware. "I was a coin-op alumnus," he says. "I knew almost everyone in the business and had access to the top people in each company. We knew that in order to sell the console we needed to have a cartridge library – and thus began the licensing frenzy. I introduced Coleco's head of licensing Al Kahn to many of the coin-op game companies. He would spearhead the licensing while my team developed the console that could render them. I was part marketing and part design."

Arcade titles of the day had the power to make or break new home hardware – a fact that Bromley was acutely aware of, because acquiring killer titles was all part of his overall strategy for the ColecoVision. "Originally, I had two games in mind; if we could get the rights, we could blow everyone out," he states. "The first was *Zaxxon*, a 3D game which was one of the best-earning titles at the time. The other was *Turbo*, one of the best driving games ever – at least in the early Eighties. I would have liked *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, but Atari had already gobbled them up. I argued against doing 'knock-offs', which was the custom of many home game companies at the time. I urged Arnold Greenberg to pay for the licences. Besides being the right thing to do, I argued that if we paid for the actual arcade game title, we did not have to describe the game or wait for customer word of mouth to promote its virtues. Just say *Turbo* or *Zaxxon* and every kid would know what you were talking about and immediately want it."

This approach – which seems obvious today but was considered high-risk at the time, hence the proliferation of clones based on famous coin-op machines – had a two-way advantage. "When a toy company promotes its home games, usually months later than the arcade introduction, the TV ads and publicity create new interest in the original arcade game," elaborates Bromley. "Because we often could not completely fit most games onto a cartridge, the kids went back to the arcades to see all the levels and features not found in the home version. Thus, we created an amazing commercial symbiosis: because the kids already knew what the game was, home sales didn't ramp up; they exploded. Thanks to that explosion, the media covered the products and prolonged the revenue stream at the arcade venues. Both the coin-op operators and manufacturers benefited from this exposure."

However, despite Bromley's hard work and the creation of a visionary business strategy that had the potential to make the company millions of dollars, the plug was very nearly pulled on the entire ColecoVision project. "Even at a very late date, Coleco's

"We wanted to make an arcade-quality videogame, but it was always shot down as too costly"

SPECIFICATIONS

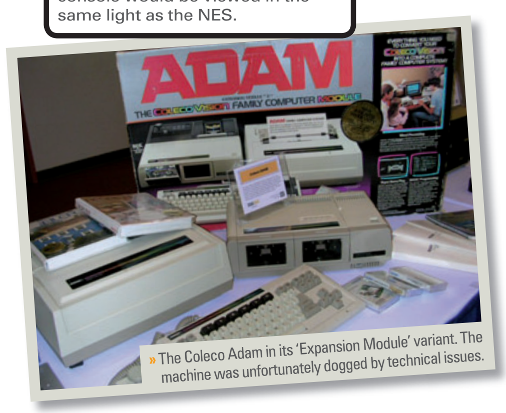
Year released: 1982

Original price: $174.99

Associated magazines: *ColecoVision Experience*

Buy it now for: £40+

Why the ColecoVision was great: More powerful than its rivals and combining arcade-quality games with the tantalising promise of expandability, it's little wonder that the ColecoVision sold impressively when it was released. Official coin-op conversions of massive titles such as *Frogger*, *Zaxxon*, *Donkey Kong* and *Turbo* were light years ahead of what was available on the Atari 2600/VCS. Had the videogame crash not happened when it did, chances are Coleco would still be around and its console would be viewed in the same light as the NES.



» The Coleco Adam in its 'Expansion Module' variant. The machine was unfortunately dogged by technical issues.



sales and marketing was about to drop the product," he remembers with a grimace. "I had to privately talk Arnold Greenberg into going forward. My argument was that the Atari VCS/2600 and Mattel Intellivision could not do either *Zaxxon* or *Turbo* in any way close to the ColecoVision, which had twice the horizontal resolution of the Atari VCS and half again that of the Intellivision. Atari was using what was essentially a chip that directly wrote the screen on the fly; thus, any complex graphic would take too long to be displayed. Add to that speed limitations that made it impossible to render graphically interesting objects fast enough to create hand-eye co-ordination difficulties. It just could not be accomplished with Atari VCS technology. The Intellivision had even more issues. It used General Instruments' five-chip set with several chips used to write different sectors of the screen. There were extensive restrictions on moving from one sector to another, creating problems moving objects diagonally over the boundaries."

Bromley was very aware of the Intellivision's limitations because he had a hand in developing the hardware inside the rival console, as at one point Coleco was about to snap up the chipset itself. "I helped develop the chipset and its operating system," he reveals. "After spending almost two years working with General Instruments, trying to fix a myriad of problems, I suggested that Coleco walk away from it. We did, and much to my amusement Mattel bought it. I was wild with glee. We knew that we could be vastly better than our competitors and they couldn't fight back."

Bromley's unwavering faith in his creation paid off, because the ColecoVision eventually made it into production. The machine's raw graphical power and clear technological advantage over the competition helped it sell 2 million units before the world came crashing down in 1983, but possibly the biggest contribution to the ColecoVision's success was the game that was given away free with each console: Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*. The story of how Coleco came to acquire this highly desirable licence from under the nose of the incumbent Atari is the stuff of videogame folklore, and Bromley is more than happy to exclusively reveal the entire gripping saga.

"It all began with a business trip to Kyoto," recounts Bromley. He was in Japan to meet with Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi. "It was late afternoon when we were allowed to enter the supreme chamber. The room was one quarter the length and width of a football field and was completely done, floor to ceiling, in matched teak panels. I don't recall as much as a clock or any picture on the walls. The only thing that broke up this expanse was the doorway opening, one eight-foot desk in the centre of the room with nothing on it but a pad and pencil, two plain wooden chairs set in front of the desk and one very tall-backed leather chair behind it. When we entered, we were the fifth, sixth and seventh objects in the room. I sat down in the left-most chair in front of the desk, and my friend, translator and mentor in all things Japanese, Makihara-san, sat next to me. Yamauchi-san's aide said 'Yamauchi-san will be in shortly,' and then, right on cue, he made his entrance. He came into the room via the parting of the wall behind the desk, which we soon realised was a door disguised as a panel. I then noticed that our entrance way was no longer visible – apparently all doors to this room were panels, or vice versa. I fully expected that behind every panel in the room was a samurai warrior ready to pounce, lest I make the smallest mistake in etiquette!" The intense formality of the setting was clearly intended to intimidate those who arrived at Nintendo's offices

Community

THE BEST COLECOVISION WEBSITES



ColecoVision Zone
www.colecovisionzone.com

■ A superlative ColecoVision reference site with complete listings of games, a collection of vintage TV commercials, original documents, and photos of rare prototypes. The textual information is ably supported by some brilliant photographs and you can even browse issues of the short-lived *ColecoVision Experience* magazine.

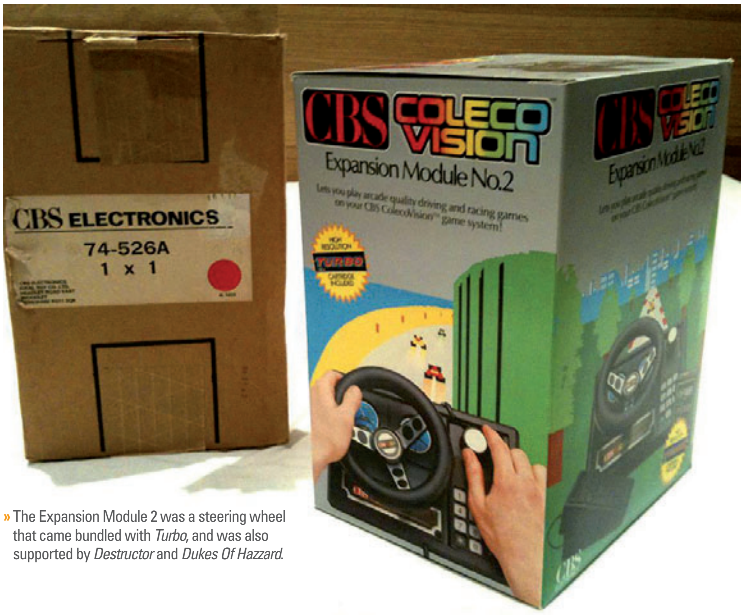


ColecoVision.dk
www.colecovision.dk

■ A Danish fan site that has a particular focus on the budding ColecoVision homebrew scene. As well as plenty of information about the console, it's also the home of CollectorVision, a group of coders that is producing games for the machine. A legally dubious version of *Mario Bros* is the most impressive effort, and more titles are promised.



» This advert was released late in the console's life and shows the Super Game Module, which was never released.



» The Expansion Module 2 was a steering wheel that came bundled with *Turbo*, and was also supported by *Destructor* and *Dukes Of Hazzard*.



to do business, and the mind-games from its president continued as the discussions progressed.

"Yamauchi-san seemed not to understand a word of English," explains Bromley with a wry smile. "Every word we said was translated. A year later I found out that he understands English extremely well." Other nefarious tactics were employed to ensure that the Japanese firm was always in the strongest position. "I learned never to tell Yamauchi-san the correct day or even time of our departure," says Bromley, "because he played an effective negotiating game. He continuously discussed non-essential items and held back important responses, then, when there was very little time before we had to leave to make the train back to Tokyo, he began the real negotiations. At this point there was a terrible pull to give in on any remaining points in order to make the train. Thus began my first lesson in commercial samurai strategy: always lie about when you must leave!"

Bromley returned to Nintendo the next day to resume negotiations, and it was on this fateful visit that he stumbled across the game that would become the ColecoVision's secret weapon. "We were shown some very unexciting videogames, as well as some handhelds that were very popular in Japan, but I felt these wouldn't work in the US," remembers Bromley. "Afterwards we had an informal late lunch at the headquarters. It was a very simple Japanese meal, not meant to impress. I enjoyed it thoroughly. After trying lots of unknown stuff – I ate these things with the conviction that they did not want me dead, and besides, they also ate it – I accepted many cups of tea, after which I asked about using the bathroom." What followed is probably the most famous trip to a toilet in videogame history.

"It turned out that the bathroom was on the floor above," explains Bromley. "I decided to find it alone, and when I came out I passed an open door that displayed a familiar silhouette – the standard upright cabinet seen in all videogame arcades. I turned on the light and there, for the first time, was *Donkey Kong*, complete with a picture of a gorilla on each side. I fell in love right there, no question." Bromley knew this title – which was hitherto unknown in the West – could be the game to propel his console into the public consciousness. He also knew he had to act fast. "A meeting was arranged for the next day," he reveals. "I said I wanted the rights to *Donkey Kong*. I didn't want Atari to find out about this game. After a lengthy conversation, Makihara-san told me that Yamauchi-san wanted a $200,000 advance and a $2 per unit royalty. It was around 10am and Yamauchi-san knew that I needed to catch my train, so then he added the kicker: the $200,000 must be wired to his account by midnight, or it's not a deal." The odds were most certainly against Bromley. "The most Coleco had ever paid for an advance for any licence up to then was $5,000," he says. "Also, they never, ever paid more than five per cent of their selling price; the worst case would be about 90 cents. Now because of the need to wire the money before 12am Tokyo time, I needed to take the next available train. I would have to call as soon as I got back to my hotel in Tokyo, which would be in the afternoon and therefore wake up Arnold Greenberg in the US, the only one who could authorise an immediate wire transfer. I was to call him at home, wake him up, and then ask him to wire $200,000 for a game he has never seen or heard of. If that wasn't bad enough, he then has to agree to more than twice the usual royalty amount!"

Bromley stayed firm, spurred on by the fact that he knew that *Donkey Kong* would be a smash hit once Western gamers laid eyes on it. "Upon my return to Tokyo, I called Arnold Greenberg from my room – I was shaking a little," he admits. "It was about four in the morning and I got: 'Whaaaaa? Do you know what time it is?' I referred him to a conversation we had days before with marketing and sales; we all agreed we needed a really spectacular game to bundle with the ColecoVision console to create an impact. I then told him of the conditions: $200,000 advance and the $2 per unit royalty. I said: 'I have found that game.' To my surprise, all he said was: 'Is it really that good?' I told him that it was as good as *Pac-Man*. He asked what it was called and I uttered '*Donkey Kong*'. Silence. For the first time

» This portable ColecoVision was produced by legendary hardware modder Ben 'Ben Heck' Heckendorn.



Variants



ColecoVision

■ The original machine was launched in 1982 with *Donkey Kong*. 500,000 units were sold, largely on the strength of this conversion. The all-important expansion slot offered the ability to upgrade, but sadly the console was discontinued in 1985.



ColecoVision Adam

■ The Adam came as an expansion for the core console or a standalone computer, capable of playing ColecoVision cartridges and more. Defects plagued the machine and it was discontinued in 1984; Coleco lost a reported $80 million on it.



Super Game Module

■ The final expansion module was effectively an upgrade to boost its power. Similar to Nintendo's Famicom Disk System, games came on high-capacity 'wafers', with more memory for bigger games. *Super Donkey Kong* was planned, but the module never made it out.



Dina 2-in-1

■ A clone of the ColecoVision and Sega SG-1000 produced by Taiwan-based Bit Corporation, this machine had a cartridge slot for each format. The pads were more traditional, and the ColecoVision's numerical keypad was moved to the main body.

I realised how silly the name sounded. What seemed like an hour later he said, 'Okay. Let's do it,' and said he would wire over the money as soon as the banks opened that day." Bromley had just secured the home console rights to one of the hottest games of the Eighties – or at least, he thought he had, until the saga took an unwelcome twist thanks largely to the Japanese way of doing business.

"Legal contracts were not something that was part of Japanese culture at that time," he explains. "We were going to create the agreement over dinner. Makihara-san, who at this point was accepted as official translator for both sides, started the negotiations and wrote down six or seven points on a cloth napkin. I forget how many points we ended up with, but when translated into English on still another napkin, I could read them all without unfolding it. We had a deal. I took my $200,000 napkin and went home." Upon returning to the US, Bromley began to have doubts about the strength of the deal he had just secured. "In the electric buzz of Tokyo, my linen napkin – now valued in the millions based on sales projections – seemed adequate. I can't remember the look on Coleco's in-house attorney's face when I pulled out the napkin, because I didn't want to see it. I tried to explain that this is how the Japanese do business: you all get high on sake, write down the points that matter, and try to get up in the morning without a hangover."

Bromley's sudden apprehensiveness was well founded; at the next Consumer Electronics Show, the house of cards very nearly collapsed completely. After months of trying to get Nintendo to sign a contact that was legally binding in the eyes of US law, Coleco finally got Yamauchi to agree to hand over the vital document at the company's CES booth. Needless to say, it didn't exactly go according to plan. "His daughter Yoko spoke to me and said that Yamauchi-san had given *Donkey Kong* to Atari," says Bromley with a face that still displays the pain of the moment. "I froze. *Donkey Kong* was going to be the CecoVision anchor. All our marketing plans were placed around that game. I was in a cold sweat. I sat down in my room and was thoroughly depressed for about two hours. I think it was 10 or 11pm



» Coleco's TV adverts went to great lengths to point out the console's superiority over the ageing Atari VCS/2600.







"Yamauchi wanted a $200,000 advance. The most Coleco had ever paid for an advance for any licence up to then was $5,000"

Collecto-Vision

Because the ColecoVision made such an impact at the time with its arcade-quality visuals, it's perhaps not surprising to learn that a sizable collector's market has grown up around it today. ColecoVision fanatic Ole Nielsen – the man behind ColecoVision.dk – vividly recalls the day his obsession started. "It was love at first sight," he says. "For me, it was primarily the graphics, tunes, and realistic game sounds the machine could deliver." The inherent appeal of the machine is amplified by the fact that it's ideal for people looking to build a complete anthology of titles in a short space of time.

"The Colecovision is perfect for collectors," states Junior Tétreault, founder of ColecoVision Zone. "The game's library is not too big – around 125 titles – and most of the games are fun." That said, there are a handful of super-rare carts that continue to elude devoted ColecoVision addicts. "Xonox games are hard to find," reveals Tétreault. "The company released 12 games and most of them are very bad and didn't sell well. Two of the double-headers, *Tomarc The Barbarian*/*Motocross Racer* and *Sir Lancelot*/*Robin Hood*, are the rarest. The late release of *Tournament Tennis* by Imagic, when the console was almost discontinued, makes this game a sought-after title. The four educational games made by Fisher-Price – *Dance Fantasy, Linking Logic, Logic Levels* and *Memory Manor* – are almost impossible to find boxed. Ironically, the most common cartridge, *Donkey Kong*, is also the rarest boxed game in North America. The cart came with the console without a box but the game was also sold as a standard retail release."

DAVE JOHNSON

Director of video graphics, Coleco



How did you become involved?
I was working in New York as a graphic designer but, having studied computer graphics, I was looking for an opportunity to work in my field. I answered an ad and met with a headhunter who set up an interview with Eric Bromley, the head of electronic games at Coleco. He was in town for Toy Fair, an annual industry event.

What did you think of the ColecoVision when you first saw it?
My first exposure was at the aforementioned Toy Fair during my job interview. There was a video wall showing mock-ups of animated cardboard cutouts. I knew enough about video, animation and computer graphics to realise that the mock-ups were fake and I pointed this out to Mr Bromley. He then pointed to one video of a Smurf running across a side-scrolling background. It was clear that this was real and was several notches above the existing home game systems.

What did your role involve specifically?
I ran a department of artists who were responsible for the development of graphics for all of the games. Day-to-day involved visiting every artist and offering suggestions, technical help, art direction, options and so on. I worked, hands-on, on several games when there was time.

What was it like working at Coleco at this time?
It was a group of very talented, super-smart, very motivated people. At the beginning, we didn't know if the product would be a success, but it was great fun in any case. As the product took off, it was very rewarding. But, by the end, we were all a little tired of the place.

How did you go about converting arcade hits to the machine and what kind of support did you get from the original developer?
The deals with the coin-op manufacturers were usually a mystery to the design group, especially in the beginning. A new machine would appear from Japan and we would set to work studying it. We had no support from the manufacturers and, at that time, code was not at all portable. We would find someone who had a knack for the game and spend hours videotaping every level. Game designers would then sit, review the tapes and document the gameplay. The artists would reproduce the graphics.

You also created original titles for the console. How did the design process differ from the coin-op ports?
A similar production process as in the ports in some respects: a game design document, a set of graphics. The creative process, in some cases, was slower and more involving. *Smurf* was the first. Eric Bromley was the lead on the project. I have to give him credit with inventing the side-scrolling concept. I'll take credit for the idea of points as you pass certain hurdles. Seemingly simple concepts but they were new at the time.

Is it true you personally asked for Coleco to secure the rights to convert *Spy Hunter* because you were such a fan of the coin-op?
There was an annual trade show where coin-op manufacturers showed off their wares. I went with George Kiss, the head of software development and also my boss. I remember begging him on the plane home to buy the rights. I was like a kid asking for a Christmas present. I really thought the music was hot; the game itself was not that interesting. We did get the rights but who knows if my request had any effect.

Why was there such a long pause before each ColecoVision loaded? Was this a technical thing?
No, no, no! Please put that rumour to rest! One day, Eric Bromley stood at my desk with a bunch of marketing execs and watched a simulator of the console. They had their watches out and counted down, deciding how long the opening screen should last. It was all about branding. The later versions of the operating system fixed that, but it was too late.

when the depression turned to anger. I called Yamauchi-san's room and asked to talk with him. His daughter answered and said that he had gone to sleep and was not to be disturbed; she said it very politely and I hung up. But I got still angrier at having my dream disintegrated by Atari's money, so I called again. She answered and I poured my heart out; I told her how the ColecoVision was my dream, how I put together a great team to build the best home videogame console ever and that *Donkey Kong* would look like crap on the Atari VCS. I guess she liked me because she asked if I could be there in 15 minutes. It was apparent that she was my ally – she believed me that this was not just a product, but also my dream. I had someone who believed what I said about the virtues of the ColecoVision and could relate them to Yamauchi-san as no one else could." With Yoko Yamauchi's assistance, Bromley's passion clearly shone through, because he was again granted the domestic rights to the game – this time in a legally binding sense.

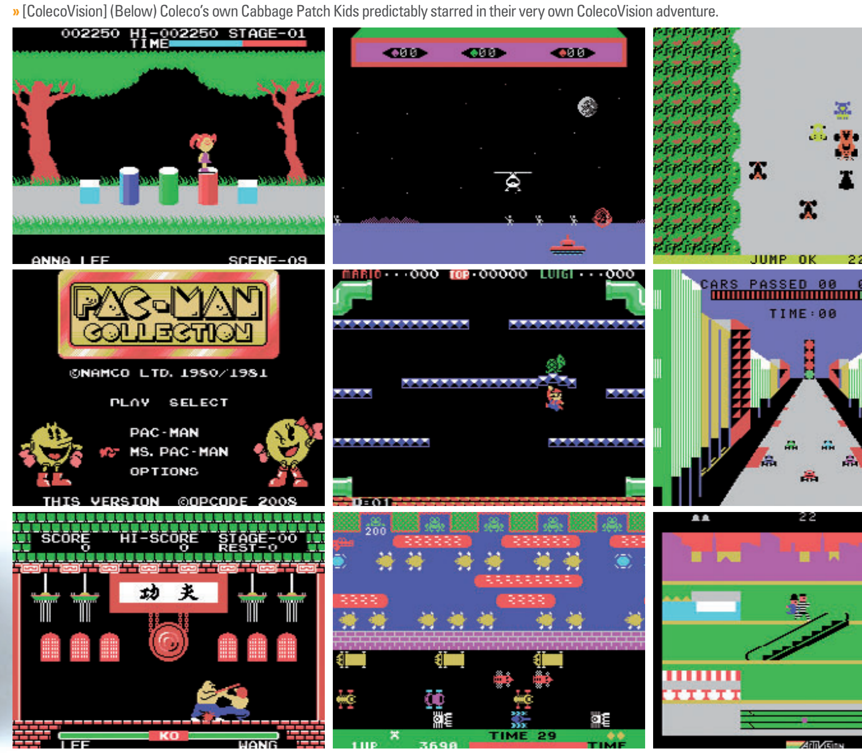
With the *Donkey Kong* saga at an end, the ColecoVision had a game that proved just how powerful the machine was. By this point Nintendo's title had become a worldwide smash. Released in August 1982 and bundled with *Donkey Kong*, the machine would find its way into half a million American homes by Christmas of that year.

Expandability was the key reason for the ColecoVision's admirable performance at retail. "There were two reasons why the ColecoVision expansion slot was carefully placed in the front," explains Bromley. "It was the key to our differentiation from other manufacturer's products. When we showed the 'beauty shot' in our ads we did not need a second picture to show it. It was always there; it promised to take you to exciting, unknown realms. That alone sold a lot of ColecoVision consoles. Secondly, it was a promise that everyone could soon have a real computer just by adding a module to the videogame console."

The ColecoVision Adam was supposed to be this home computer module, but it morphed into a fully fledged machine in its own right. "We created ColecoVision's operating system and the expansion slot connector for, among other things, the Adam computer. It was part of our plans from day one. The Adam was originally a keyboard with a deck that extended about two inches beyond the function keys containing the other computer circuits. It fit snugly against the console at the same height." The Adam's story is too lengthy and remarkable to cover in depth here, but suffice to say that it wasn't the success that Coleco had envisaged. However, the expansion slot was invaluable for other uses.

"We were the first to make home videogames to closely resemble current arcade games," states Bromley. "But if we were to really push that claim, we needed to have a steering wheel controller – complete with gear shift

» [ColecoVision] (Below) Coleco's own Cabbage Patch Kids predictably starred in their very own ColecoVision adventure.





ColecoVision Reborn



The ColecoVision may be nearly 30 years old, but that doesn't mean that games aren't still being cooked up. Thanks to the internet, a solid development community has sprung up and released several notable titles on the console.

"In 2009, *Mario Bros*, *Pac-Man Collection*, *Ghost 'N' Zombie*, and *Ghostblaster* were released by homebrew programmers," says ColecoVision Zone's Junior Tétreault. "A new expansion module is planned for some time this year, which will allow more sophisticated games. This will help the ColecoVision community to grow and will encourage people to rediscover the console they played 25 years ago."

Fellow ColecoVision enthusiast Ole Nielsen is an active part of this revival; he's involved in CollectorVision, which is the group responsible for many of the aforementioned new releases. "What appeals to me today is the homebrew games that many talented people have chosen to create," he says. "When the game is finished, they sell them complete with box, label and manual – just like an authentic ColecoVision release." As a gamer who has experienced the machine both in its prime and more recently thanks to its revival, Nielsen admits that it's the console's intrinsic appeal that keeps him coming back for more. "For me, it's still engaging regardless of whether the game is from the early Eighties or is a newer title, which attempts to replicate the experience."











and an accelerator – the ability to attach realistic weapons and the flexibility to match future arcade game controls. The expansion slot was a way to get beyond the 'joystick and button' control system. We also marketed a track ball controller and a 'Super Controller' for boxing and baseball games, which could control four or more objects at once. This was originally designed with 'tactile feedback' – a feature that could not be engineered at the time."

Arguably the most intriguing hardware add-on was a module that allowed ColecoVision owners to effortlessly increase their software library – providing they had owned an Atari VCS previously. "We had one of our better engineers work secretly on a circuit that would render Atari cartridges on the ColecoVision," Bromley recalls. "The idea was if a kid already had those Atari games they could use them on the ColecoVision. This would counteract the parent's mantra: 'But you already have a videogame console.' The kid could say: 'But I can still use my old cartridges.' After several months of development, we finally saw the finished VCS player circuit and it worked perfectly. However, the module was more expensive to build than the actual Atari VCS was to buy. We toyed with the idea of buying Atari chips from one of their secondary suppliers, but that idea was dropped very quickly."

Atari took legal action when the module hit the market, but because it was possible to assemble a VCS-compatible device using standard parts, it was ultimately unsuccessful – although a royalty agreement was eventually put in place between the two firms.

Early in 1983, the ColecoVision passed the 1 million sales marker, and had the industry stayed buoyant, Coleco would have almost certainly been in with a chance of becoming the number one hardware manufacturer in the States. Sadly things didn't stay the same; the infamous crash of 1983 put the industry into a nosedive and all of Coleco and Bromley's hard work was ruined. The company staged a retreat from the videogame arena, moving back into children's toys – the most notable range being Cabbage Patch Kids. "They bet on plush, Nintendo bet on electronics and video," says Bromley with a shrug of the shoulders. "Nintendo hung in until videogames took off again, while the Greenbergs instead blamed myself and the other ColecoVision guys for the failure; all the guys who took them in 1976 from bankruptcy to a million-dollar company and in the next eight years to almost a billion." However, even cute fabric babies couldn't save the firm's bacon. "It only took a couple of years after we left to get back to bankruptcy," Bromley comments. "If Coleco hadn't given up on videogames – crash or not – it would have been here today instead of Nintendo."

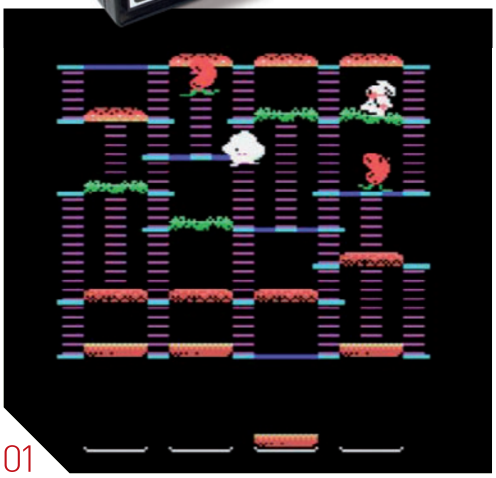




» The above promotional flyer details the steering wheel – better known as Expansion Module 2 – and a brief description of what would eventually become the Coleco Adam personal computer system.



PERFECT TEN



01

BURGER TIME

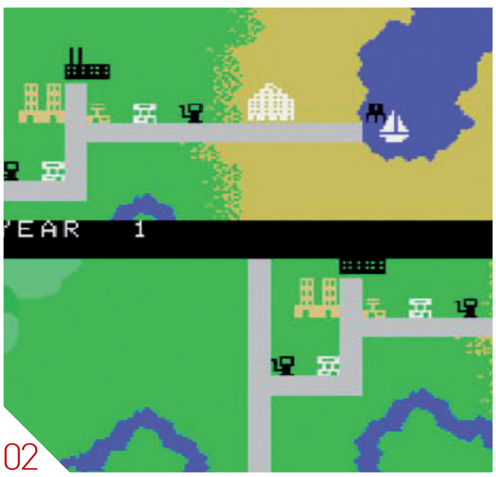
» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** DIGIMAX
» **PRICE:** £10+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** DEFENDER

01 **One thing that** constantly impresses with the ColecoVision is the sheer number of excellent arcade ports that are available for it. Coleco's port of *Burger Time* is easily one of its best, and the end result is an incredibly faithful conversion of the cult arcade coin-op. Animation throughout is superb, with the large, well-animated sprites rarely suffering from flickering, while the gameplay is extremely close to its arcade parent. Pete doesn't feel quite as fast as he did in the original game, but a choice of four difficulty levels and excellent, tight controls ensure that *Burger Time* will be a game that you'll constantly find yourself returning to. Highly recommended.

FORTUNE BUILDER

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £40+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MOUSE TRAP

02 **Predating *SimCity*** by a good five years, *Fortune Builder* is an extremely polished sim that proves that there was more to Coleco's machine than just arcade conversions. Initially you're presented with a large space of land, but you're soon able to build a staggering range of items, ranging from simple roads to apartments and even casinos. The aim is to ensure that your city reaches a certain value, but your success can be hindered by random events like rampaging termites. For all its addictiveness, *Fortune Builder* really comes into its own with the addition of its insanely polished two-player mode that allows you to compete or work together in order to make the best city.



02

GORF

» **RELEASE:** 1983
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £7+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ILLUSIONS

03 **As with every** other official port of Jamie Fenton's coin-op, the ColecoVision version is missing the '*Galaxians*' stage. That omission aside, this is nevertheless an excellent arcade port and is miles above anything on similar consoles at the time. It's missing the cool speech from the original, but otherwise the sound is strong, mimicking its arcade parent. Visually it's also impressive, with well-detailed sprites that perfectly capture the spirit of the arcade hit. Best of all, though, is the gameplay. Yes, the missing stage is a pity, but the excellent collision detection and controls certainly make up for it.

TURBO

» **RELEASE:** 1982
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £20+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MR DO!

04 **The astonishing *Turbo*** can only be played with the ColecoVision's steering wheel controller. With that caveat out of the way, let's examine one of the machine's most impressive games. While not a racing game like other titles on the system – you're simply rated on how many other cars you pass – *Turbo* remains one of the best examples of the genre. Not only is the sense of speed sensational, but the graphics are phenomenal, with huge buildings that other racers of the time could only dream of. An unforgettable experience and easily one of the ColecoVision's best ports.

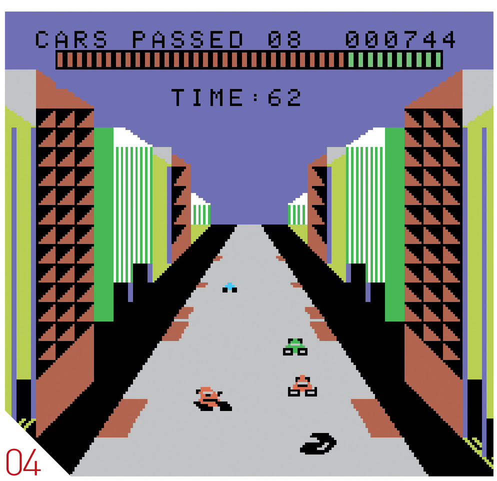
RIVER RAID

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
» **PRICE:** £13+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** PITFALL!

05 **Activision released plenty** of its Atari games on the ColecoVision, with many of them being superior to the 2600 versions. *River Raid* is no different, and even after a quarter of a century, this port remains brilliant fun. The sprites are more refined, the scrolling is smoother and everything feels that little more polished. Ultimately, however, it's the enduring gameplay that grabs you, and *River Raid*'s blend of strategic shooting – blowing up fuel barrels gives you points, but reduces the available fuel – and hectic blasting ensures that you'll never become bored of it.



03



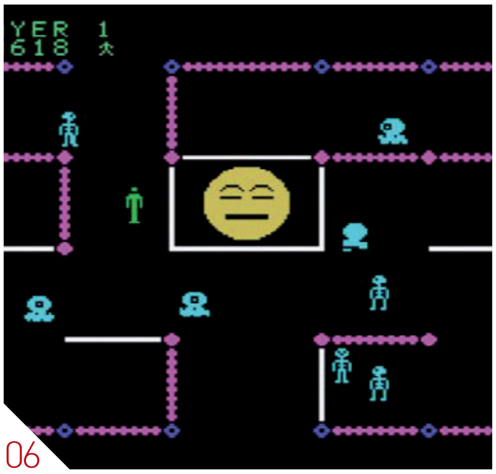
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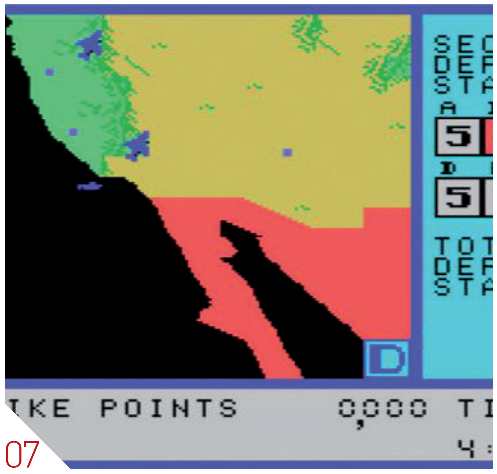
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GAMES

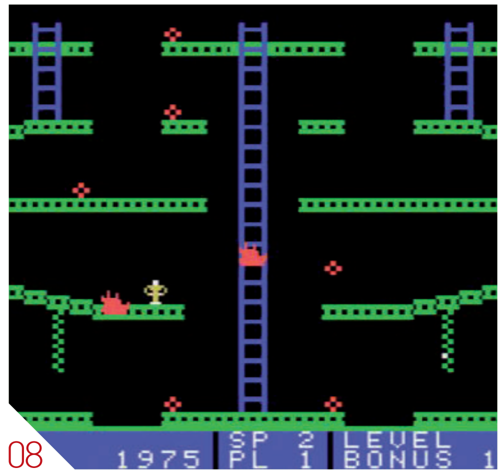
If you want excellent arcade ports and original content, this really is a console you should own



06



07



08

FRENZY

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £13+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** LOOPING

06 ***Frenzy* wasn't ported** to many home systems, but as we mentioned in last month's issue, the ColecoVision version really is an impressive port. The controls are responsive, allowing you to navigate each room with ease, and collision detection is as tight as a proverbial drum, while the AI ensures that you'll find plenty of challenge. Graphically it delivers thanks to a minimum amount of flicker, authentic sprites and solid animation of the lead character. Ultimately, though, it's *Frenzy*'s frantic gameplay that will keep you returning. Another great game that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

WARGAMES

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £20+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SUPER ACTION FOOTBALL

07 **With so many** great arcade ports, it's refreshing to add an original ColecoVision game to the list. The nearest descendent to *WarGames* is Atari's *Missile Command*. The difference here, however, is that you're defending the United States, and you have to nip between each section and see off the incoming missiles. The end result is an amazingly hectic experience that really cranks up the tension as you desperately try to fend off increasingly tough waves of warheads. The aesthetics are fairly simplistic but you'll be having so much fun that you simply won't care.

JUMPMAN JR

» **RELEASE:** 1984
» **PUBLISHER:** EPYX
» **PRICE:** £15+
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** GATEWAY TO APSHAI

08 **Yes, the conversion** of *Donkey Kong* is impressive, and yes, *Miner 2049er* is extremely polished, but this superb effort from Randy Glover and Chris Capener is definitely our favourite ColecoVision platformer. The visuals are pretty uninspiring, but it matters not as the frantic gameplay is absolutely sublime. There are 12 stages to make your way through as Jumpman bounds across each stage in his pursuit of bomb. It may not be the most jaw-dropping-looking ColecoVision title, but in terms of gameplay it's virtually unmatched and a must for platform fans.



09

PEPPER II

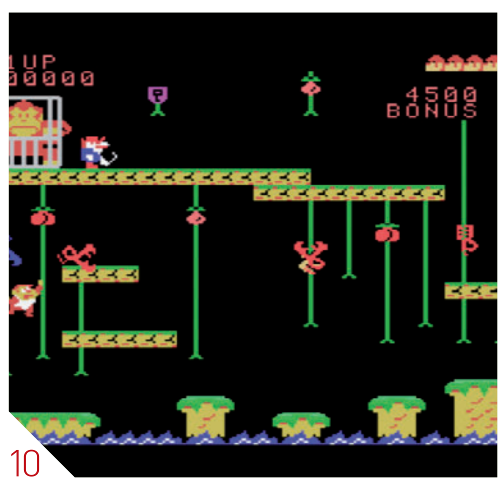
» **RELEASE:** 1983
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £10
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** Q*BERT

09 **Think of a** cross between *Pac-Man, Qix* and *Amidar* and you'll have something in your mind's eye that quite possibly resembles *Pepper II*. A port of Exidy's 1982 coin-op – we've no idea what happened to the original *Pepper*, or if it even existed – each screen is full of mazes and enemies and is highly reminiscent of Konami's excellent *Amidar*. The difference, however, is that if you re-cross a line you've re-painted it will open up again, which adds a great level of strategy to proceedings and is further enhanced by the fact that you can actually play across four different stages at the same time. Yes, it's another arcade port, but another we heartily recommend.

DONKEY KONG JR

» **RELEASE:** 1983
» **PUBLISHER:** COLECO
» **PRICE:** £10
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** DONKEY KONG

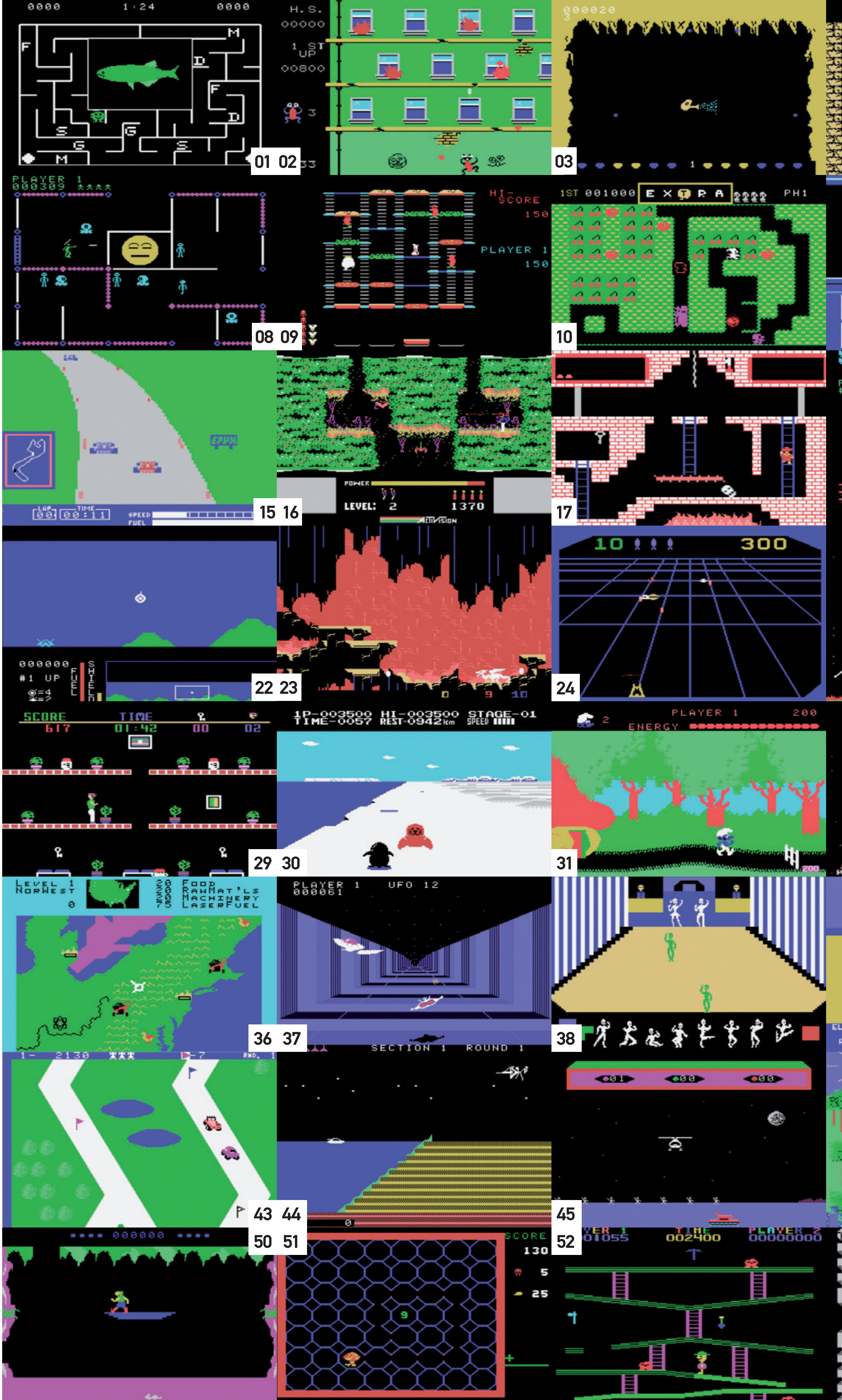
10 ***Donkey Kong* may** have been a pack-in and a huge success for Coleco's marvellous machine, but we actually prefer *Donkey Kong Jr*. It's missing one of the levels from its arcade parent, but this is another predictably good arcade conversion that has you scaling chains as you try to rescue your dad from an irate Mario. Gameplay is extremely smooth; the large visuals do a great job of capturing the cartoony sprites of the arcade original, while spot-on collision detection means that you'll never lose a life unless you messed up yourself. It's not quite arcade perfect, but this is another cracking conversion that leaves the Atari 2600 effort on the starting blocks.



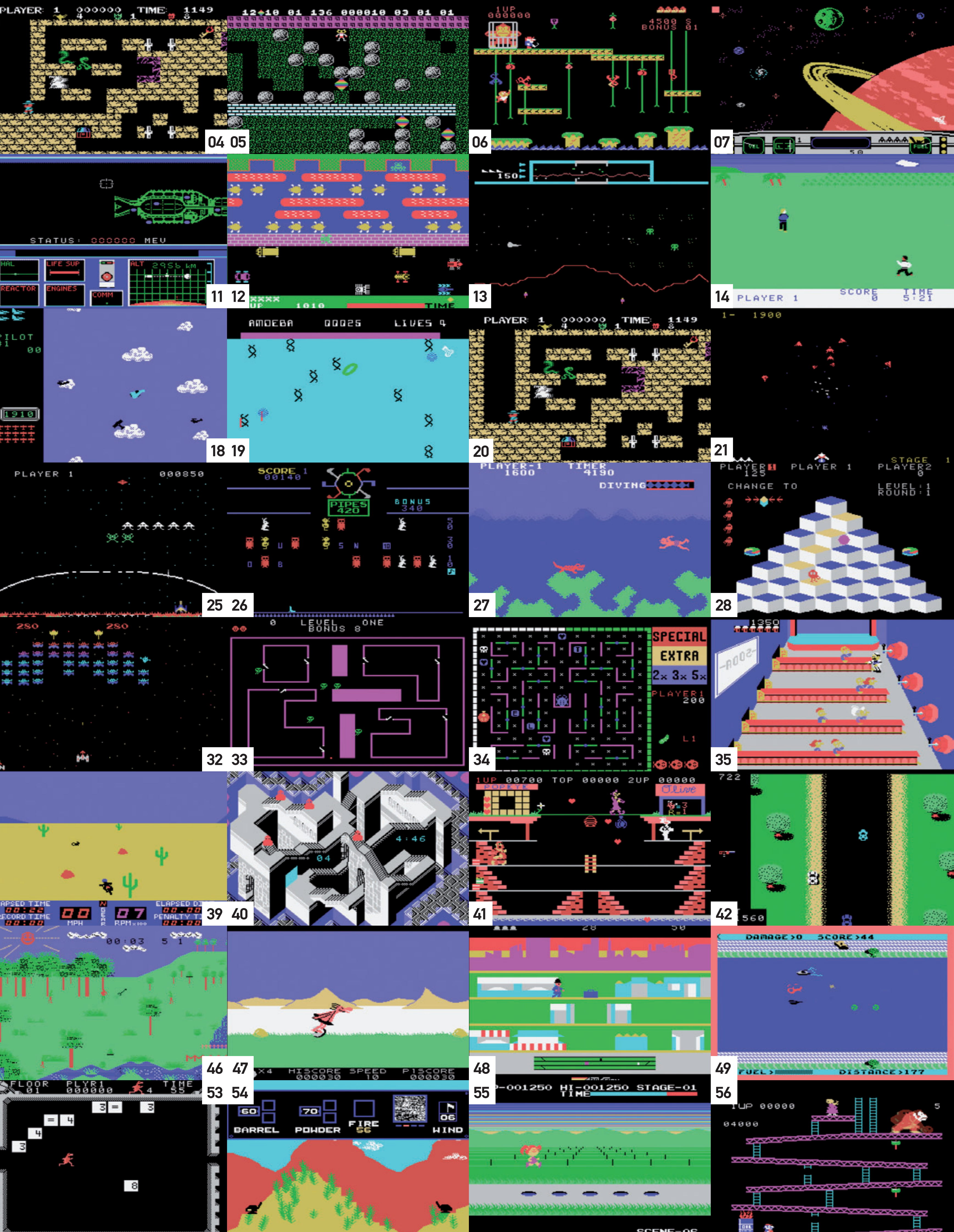
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ColecoVision and the rest...

A powerhouse when it came to spectacular arcade conversions, Coleco's machine also boasted plenty of original games. Here are just a few of its best...



01 ALPHABET ZOO
02 FRANTIC FREDDY
03 SLURPY
04 TUTANKHAM
05 BOULDERDASH
06 DONKEY KONG JR
07 MOONSWEEPER
08 FRENZY
09 BURGER TIME
10 MR DO!
11 2010: A GRAPHIC ACTION GAME
12 FROGGER
13 DEFENDER
14 CHUCK NORRIS SUPERKICKS
15 PITSTOP
16 H.E.R.O.
17 MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE
18 TIME PILOT
19 EVOLUTION
20 TOURNAMENT TENNIS
21 GYRUSS
22 VICTORY
23 WING WAR
24 BEAM RIDER
25 GORF
26 CARNIVAL
27 JUNGLE HUNT
28 Q*BERT
29 THE HEIST
30 ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE
31 SMURF: RESCUE IN GARGAMEL'S CASTLE
32 GALAXIAN
33 VENTURE
34 LADY BUG
35 TAPPER
36 WAR ROOM
37 BUCK ROGERS: PLANET OF ZOOM
38 DANCE FANTASY
39 MOTOCROSS RACER
40 ILLUSIONS
41 POPEYE
42 SPY HUNTER
43 UP 'N DOWN
44 JAMES BOND
45 CHOPLIFTER
46 ROBIN HOOD
47 BC'S QUEST
48 KEYSTONE KAPERS
49 AQUA ATTACK
50 TOMARC THE BARBARIAN
51 AMAZING BUMPMAN
52 MINER 2049ER
53 WIZARD OF ID'S WIZ MATH
54 ARTILLERY DUEL
55 CABBAGE PATCH KIDS: ADVENTURES IN THE PARK
56 DONKEY KONG



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PLAYER 1 000000 TIME 1149
4500 BONUS 01
STATUS 000000 MEV
HAL
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REACTOR
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AMOEBA 00025 LIVES 4
PLAYER 1 000850
SCORE 00140
PIPES 420
BONUS 340
PLAYER-1 1600 TIMER 4190
DIVING
CHANGE TO
LEVEL BONUS 8
SPECIAL
EXTRA
2x 3x 5x
PLAYER1 200
1UP 00700 TOP 00000 2UP 00000
POPEYE
DAMAGE>0 SCORE>44
FUEL>
DISTANCE>177
HISCORE 000030 SPEED 10 P1SCORE 000030
FLOOR 01 PLYR1 000000 TIME 55
BARREL
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THE MAKING OF…



RETURN OF THE JEDI



THE MOST DIVISIVE OF THE ORIGINAL MOVIES, RETURN OF THE JEDI WAS DISMISSED IN KEVIN SMITH'S CLERKS AS JUST HAVING "A BUNCH OF MUPPETS". ATARI'S GAME WAS SIMILARLY CONTROVERSIAL, DITCHING THE VECTOR APPROACH FOR AN ISOMETRIC VIEWPOINT. CRAIG GRANNELL USES THE FORCE TO COMMUNICATE WITH DESIGNER DENNIS HARPER ABOUT HOW IT CAME TO BE







ALTERNATE ENDINGS

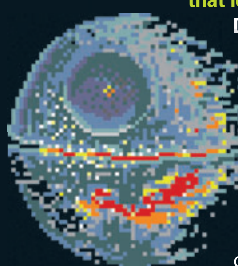
Once *Jedi* was confirmed, Dennis went to Lucasfilm and was given a script to read, and told he couldn't leave the room nor write anything down. "It was very close to the movie, apart from the end, which was weird," he says. "The Emperor's killing Luke, but from the depths of his heart, Luke gets some Jedi energy and kills the Emperor – Vader isn't even mentioned. I was like, 'What? That doesn't make sense at all!'"

On seeing the completed movie, Dennis realised that he'd been given a bogus script with a switched ending for the sake of secrecy. "I guess they didn't want anyone to know the real ending and that Vader was basically a good guy, but it's a good job I didn't put that part into the game!"



■ Retro Gamer: How did you approach the game?
Dennis Harper: I wanted to identify key gameplay segments representative of the movie. In those days, you weren't really able to tell a story – we didn't have a lot of narrative – so I focused on action scenes. This format was taken from Mike Hally's *Star Wars* – in that game, he identified the towers and Death Star trench, and recreated them.

■ RG: Why didn't you use vector graphics for *Jedi*?
DH: Lyle Rains, our chief technical guy, gave me the assignment and he said that Atari had developed some innovative hardware that could store an enormous amount of playfield graphics using relatively little storage. *Return Of The Jedi* was to be the flagship game to show off this technology. We wanted it to have rich, colourful backgrounds and a deep kind of gameplay.



■ RG: Where did the viewpoint and graphic design come from?
DH: The general design came from the perspective view, which was influenced by *Zaxxon* – a popular game at the time, and we wanted to leverage that success. The colourful playfields were a result of a new Atari chip that enabled dithering to make graphics smoother. It was very complicated, though – the dithering effect wasn't done with an algorithm. Instead, we had look-up tables – we'd run processes overnight to develop tables to create the pixel interpolation. It was interesting hardware, but it fell a bit flat, because you couldn't do anything really detailed. Everything's mashed together at a certain point, but it served a purpose.

■ RG: How did the viewpoint inform the gameplay?
DH: I had a concept I wanted to use throughout. Most action in *Jedi* was based around the characters being chased. But chase scenes are hard to communicate in videogames, and almost impossible using first-person viewpoints like in *Star Wars*. The perspective allowed us to include chases, because you could see behind you and avoid their shots.

■ RG: How did this work with *Jedi*'s iconic speeder bikes?
DH: I thought of that wave as two games: if you get speeder bikes in front of you, it plays a bit like *Space Invaders*, but if they get behind you, you have to bump them into a tree or use traps. You go through a trap first, and as your enemy follows, Ewoks set traps off – slam tree trunks together, throw rocks, that kind of thing. This would have been tough to do in 3D.

■ RG: The next wave has a split effect, cutting between Chewbacca in an AT-ST walker and a space battle. Where did that idea come from?
DH: I think I was the first person to do that kind of cutting in a game, and it was down to wanting to recreate the movie. In the script, I got how they were doing cut-away scenes – while a group try to destroy the shield generator on Endor, there's this space battle happening – and I wanted to simulate that. All that really happens in the game is the playfield changes, but the gameplay does not. Your control and position are the same, and if you've flanking ships in space, they're still there when the scene cuts back. It's just the graphics that are switched, placing you in a new environment with new goals.

■ RG: And then there's the attack on the Death Star…
DH: With that, we wanted the thrill of the chase again. Even when the reactor's destroyed and you flee, there are flames chasing you as you escape!



■ RG: Do you think *Jedi*'s gameplay elements make the game feel more movie-like than *Star Wars*?
DH: I think so, but then the decision to change the graphics led to a different gameplay style. *Star Wars* is first-person and a very immersive experience. But with the waves we used in *Jedi*, a first-person view would have looked the same throughout. With our graphics system we had the opportunity to show the player their vehicle, and it turned out to be a good decision. Also, *Jedi* was a more complicated movie than *Star Wars*, and so it turned out best to recreate the scenes with the hardware we had. To tell the truth, we didn't think about it in those terms back then. We'd get the hardware and figure out the best way to approach a game. I guess if I'd had first-person hardware, I'd have figured out something. How to bump a speeder bike in 3D… that would probably have given me some sleepless nights!

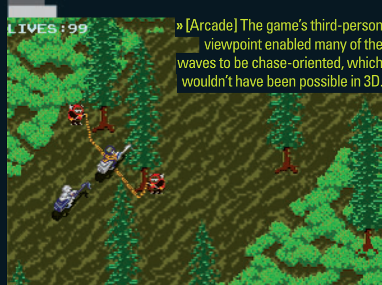
■ RG: Is there anything you'd change about the game?
DH: Given the situation and the hardware, we did a good job, and when it came out *Jedi* had more playfield graphics displayed than any previous game. It would have been interesting to explore a 3D treatment, just to see how it would have worked, and to have the entire trilogy as the same sort of product. But I wasn't making the decisions in those days – I was just the programmer in the trenches, and Atari wanted something a bit different to what they'd done before. One thing I would change, given the chance to go back, is I'd ask for an additional programmer. *Jedi* was one of those games that had to come out close to the movie, and those deals happen at the last moment. They say you've got six months to do the game, and no reasonable game's ever done in that amount of time, so you're just killing yourself to get the thing out. I fell asleep under my lab bench many times!



» [Arcade] The look of *Return Of The Jedi* was down to Atari wanting to show off its new graphics technology.



» [Arcade] The then-popular *Zaxxon* heavily influenced *Return Of The Jedi*'s viewpoint.



» [Arcade] The game's third-person viewpoint enabled many of the waves to be chase-oriented, which wouldn't have been possible in 3D.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI GAMES
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE (LATER CONVERTED TO VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS)
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP/SURVIVAL
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £500+ FOR A WORKING CAB



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1985

TOOBIN'
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1988

PRIMAL RAGE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994





MARTYN BROWN

Fed up with seeing their beloved machine swimming in a sea of mediocre ST ports, one team of devoted coders, led by Martyn Brown, formed a studio with one goal: to show the true power of the Amiga. **Retro Gamer** sits down to discuss Martyn's career and Team17…

WHAT BEGAN AS a mutual passion for all things Amiga from a talented band of shareware coders formed the basis for a company that rapidly became synonymous with its users. Team17's mission was to demonstrate the true potential of Commodore's beast and staunchly supported the machine, even through its bleak CD32 days. For this reason the company rapidly garnered a loyal fan base that has continued long after the commercial life of the machine. Following the recent release of Alien Breed Evolution, we felt there was no better time to catch up with Martyn Brown, Team17's co-founder, to get the definitive story behind his prolific career and find out what the future holds for Team17.



RETRO GAMER: So Martyn, what did you want to do when you were still at school?

MARTYN BROWN: Other than go home and play on my VCS and muck about with ZX80s, I think for a while I was convinced I'd become a chemist. That sounds pretty dull, and I guess it was a ton of films with bubbling, fizzing liquids, colours, smells and explosions that attracted me. But that changed when I did O-level chemistry and began to learn about bloody valancy and all that molecular weight and structure theory – it was no fun at all, as I soon discovered, and there was much more to chemistry than lobbing chunks of sodium in water and seeing it fizz and pop. Since there was no real videogames industry back then there wasn't really any opportunity for any careers in it. People didn't really have computers at home – there wasn't even one at my school – and we were still in the era of very basic videogame systems like the Atari VCS. So, in 1982, when my five minutes with the careers woman came, my career was "an office job". I had no idea what I'd be doing.

RG: When did you start becoming interested in programming?

MB: It wasn't until I'd finished and got told I could do a BTEC in electrical engineering/microelectronics – that had a section on low-level programming – that I plumped for that, although it still wasn't a career; it was just something I could do that involved programming on a formal basis, and not the ad hoc self-teaching route I'd begun on the early machines. Even then, when I'd done my BTEC course, I was still unsure about what I was going to end up doing, despite developing a game with my mate while at college, as it still wasn't a career or anything. I went to work in a games shop over Christmas and ended up working with the guy who owned it for going on 25 years.

RG: And when was it that you first became interested in videogames?

MB: I think it was just a fascination when I first saw the early *Pong* games. My dad brought one home and that was that. I later got an Atari VCS and avidly followed the development of arcade machines. I vividly recall seeing both *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* for the first time and I was just hooked; totally and utterly obsessed. I was always designing my own board games and, as a single child, videogames represented a real opportunity to play games that didn't need someone else. That was quite a thing for me.

RG: What did your parents think about your move into the videogames industry?

MB: Well, it took probably 15 years of being 'in it' for my mum to realise that it was actual work, as such, and not something I was pottering about at. I remember quite poignantly calling home from the hotel in Hollywood, and just the fact that I was in LA was a bit much for her, but that kept me pretty level about everything. My dad was very enthusiastic. He takes huge pride in the fact that he bought me my Spectrum and he's an



"I vividly recall seeing Space Invaders and Galaxian for the first time, and I was just hooked"

MARTYN BROWN'S SELECTIVE SOFTOGRAPHY

Henry's Hoard 1985
Full Contact 1991
Alien Breed 1991
Project-X 1992
Assassin 1992
Alien Breed II: The Horror Continues 1993
Superfrog 1993
Qwak 1993
Overdrive 1993
F17 Challenge 1993
Body Blows 1993
Body Blows Galactic 1993
Arcade Pool 1994
Alien Breed: Tower Assault 1994
Super Stardust 1994
ATR: All Terrain Racing 1995
Worms 1995
Worms: Reinforcements 1995
Alien Breed 3D 1995
World Rally Fever 1996
The Speris Legacy 1996
X2 1996
Worms 2 1997
Addiction Pinball 1998
Arcade Pool II 1999
Worms Armageddon 1999
Worms Pinball 1999
Worms World Party 2001
Stunt GP 2001
Worms Blast 2002
Worms 3D 2003
Worms 4: Mayhem 2005
Lemmings 2006
Worms: Open Warfare 2006
Army Men: Major Malfunction 2006
Lemmings 2006
Worms: Open Warfare 2 2007
Worms 2007
Super Stardust HD 2007
Worms: A Space Oddity 2008
Worms 2: Armageddon 2009
Worms 2009
Alien Breed Evolution 2009

avid consumer of games, gadgets and consoles himself. My parents divorced when I was young, so I possibly got spoilt a little bit with the likes of the Spectrum from my dad, since my mum couldn't afford such things.

RG: Most people we've interviewed often started off programming on the ZX81. Were you the same?

MB: My friend up the road had a ZX81, but I couldn't afford one so I used that and at the weekend would go into Leeds to the computer enthusiast stores like Micropower, where they'd let you use the new home computers – cool ones with sound cards, colour and real keyboards. We used to buy the programming magazines and type in the listings. I learned BASIC first and later moved on to machine code and assembly language. My own real programming and creative bent started when I got the Spectrum in 1982 at 15.

RG: What games did you used to enjoy playing back in the day?

MB: All the classics really, from Ultimate's Spectrum stuff, to the Beyond games like Mike Singleton's *Doomdark's Revenge* and *Lords Of Midnight*. As a footy fan, I remember obsessing over *Football Manager* and *Match Day* from Ocean before I got *International Soccer* on the C64. One of the proudest things for me was going out on the piss with Mike Singleton and meeting people like Jon Ritman a few years later.

RG: Can you tell us a little about some of the early Spectrum games you made?

MB: I didn't make too many. My first large title was created with the Adventure Game Creator and was a game called *FOT*. It was an adventure game with just two rooms, but with tons of objects, which you could do anything you could think of with – and plenty of stuff you couldn't imagine. It was a very silly, juvenile and obscene game that never got released. Then,

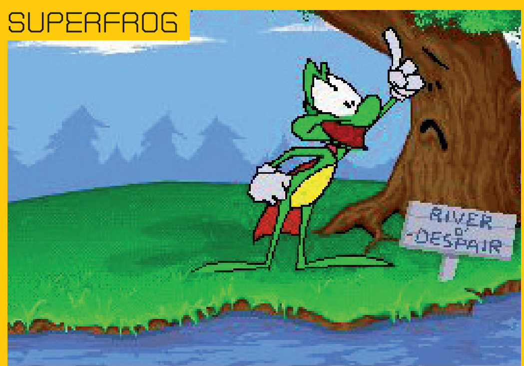
* FIVE TO PLAY

WORMS WORLD PARTY



AS ENDURING AS Team17 itself, *Worms* contained all the core elements that were typical of the studio's Amiga output. Essentially plonking *Lemmings* inside a trajectory warfare title, *Worms* remains the studio's most successful series to date. The brainchild of Andy Davidson, who wrote an early version of the game for entry into a homebrew competition in *Amiga Format*, the concept was later snapped up after Team17 saw potential in the idea. We actually struggled on deciding a single, series-defining game. Initially, we plumped for the original, but the online skirmishes of *Worms Armageddon* were so damn addictive. Then we considered the excellent *Worms 4* for proving to naysayers that the game could work in 3D. In the end, though, we went with *Worms World Party*. It provides everything you could ever want from a *Worms* game, and throws in a fantastic level editor to boot.

SUPERFROG



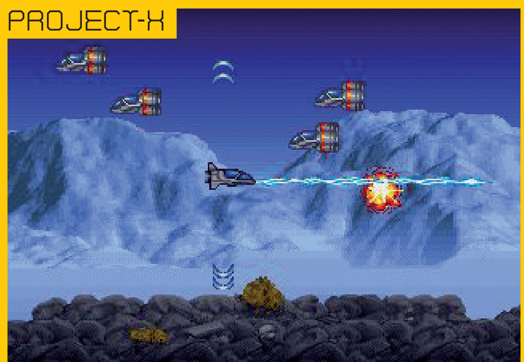
WHEN IT WAS looking like the Amiga would never have anything to match the delights of console platform games coming from Japan, Team17 once again came to the machine's rescue by delivering a gorgeous-looking platform game starring a classic and memorable videogame hero of its own. *Superfrog* was a colourful, humorous and slick platformer that parodied the classic Brothers Grimm fairytale, *The Frog Prince*. Featuring sublime cartoon visuals, fantastic music and fluid controls, it remains one of Team17's most fondly remembered and accomplished Amiga titles, and fans have been crying out for a sequel for years.

ALIEN BREED: TOWER ASSAULT



ALIEN BREED TOOK the top-down genre that was popularised by *Gauntlet* then added a canny dollop of sci-fi and survival horror inspired by the menacing terror of the *Alien* films. While the first two games were excellent, many fans cite the third, and final, 2D episode in the series, *Tower Assault*, as the pinnacle of the franchise. A fantastic refinement of the first two games, *Tower Assault* introduced free-form gameplay, multiple endings and fantastic visuals – most notably that jaw-dropping intro. An essential Amiga classic and one of the best CD32 games money can buy. But boy was it hard.

PROJECT-X



WHILE OFT CRITICISED for being unbalanced, unfairly challenging – which Martyn revealed was likely due to the game having no QA or focus testing – and featuring uninspired enemy designs, *Project-X* was not without merit. From a technical standpoint it was sublime, however. And in contrast, many who have been skilled enough to actually finish the game consider it a masterpiece in the genre. If you found the original game a little hard going, you might be better off picking up the special edition instead, or, if you're a keen importer, the Japanese version of the PlayStation sequel, *X2*. Both tone down the insanity a few notches through easier gameplay and shorter levels.

HENRY'S HOARD



THIS VERY EARLY and colourful Spectrum platform game was written by Martyn and a pal while at college. Inspired by *Jet Set Willy*, the game found the player assuming the role of a bored gnome that embarks on a dangerous mission to find various pieces of gold scattered around a castle. Featuring 50 screens, bright-looking graphics and complemented with some challenging platform gameplay, it's actually a surprisingly good *Willy* clone, especially as it retailed for the cheap sum of £1.99. As a result, the game scored well in magazines of the day, garnering a 65% in *Crash*. Fans of Martyn's games should definitely check it out.

while at college, I worked with a pal on a game called *Henry's Hoard*, which was based on *Jet Set Willy*. I did all the graphics, level design and some of the code, including the music player. We eventually managed to sell it to the owner of a local game store – the same one who, a few years later, I started both 17Bit and later Team17 with. I used to get a great deal of pleasure writing spoof Ceefax systems – my first elaborate one was called *The Spadge Factory* and was planned to get released with *Henry's Hoard* but never did.

RG: You originally started off as 17Bit Software and specialised in the Amiga's public domain market. How did you decide to go down this route?

MB: When we got paid for the game – I got £250 – I went straight out and bought a Commodore 128D, which had a proper 5.25" floppy drive rather than the shitty Microdrive on my Spectrum. I also ended up on Compunet, which was an online bulletin board that had live chat, and I got to know a lot of programmers, artists and musicians. On Compunet, which preceded the internet by a good few years, people would post demos, music and artwork, and this was terribly exciting. Quickly I became a huge fan, even if my time with a Commodore machine was fairly short-lived. It wasn't long before I upgraded again to an Atari ST and very soon after that, after seeing the infamous demo of it on *Tomorrow's World* on BBC One in 1985, a Commodore Amiga.

RG: So what happened next?

MB: Through collecting all this stuff I had the idea of forming an Amiga enthusiast club, we did a monthly 'update' disk, which demonstrated the best underground art and music, gave tips on the system, distributed freeware tools, and encouraged users to send in their own work and helped mentor a few people such as Rico Holmes and Allister Brimble. The club, 17Bit – so called since it was 'that bit better than the rest' in a 16-bit computer world – became quite successful and eventually the group of regular contributors, who I became firm friends with, became the basis of the team that got started on the Team17 games.

RG: What was it that attracted you to the Amiga, as opposed to other systems of the time?

MB: I think that there was just something very 'cool' about the machine. It just seemed to do it all, even if it did have digital sound and not the 'soul' of the C64 SID chip. It put capability and power into the hands of normal folk and suddenly you could create things that looked great; it was a real level playing field. My interest from the demo, audio and art scene on the C64 naturally moved on to the Amiga, where it was far more impressive. I started collecting and communicating with a lot of the demo scene guys and many are still friends to this day, either still working in the industry or retired.

RG: So when was it that you decided to turn your talent for programming to the Amiga?

Assembly on the Amiga was perhaps a step too far for me and I was too impatient to learn, so I spent a lot of time with things like Francois Lionet's fabulous 'AMOS' programming language and made lots of applications and tools with that, but no real games as such. Some of my utilities got quite popular and I enjoyed that an awful lot, although they were never really meant to be of any commercial value.



» Martyn's passion for the Amiga has come full circle with the release of *Alien Breed Evolution*.

> “There was just something very cool about the Amiga”

I also just loved the vibe of the Amiga-only games, and that got me going and wanting to put an end to the stream of Atari ST ports that really didn't make the most of the machine. We wanted to put the enthusiasm of the underground demo feel into our games and I think we pretty much succeeded.

RG: How did that transition from writing applications to making full, technically impressive games for the Amiga go?

MB: Looking back, you have to concede that it went really well. None of us had really developed commercial games to that kind of level before and there was no plan; everyone kind of just got on with it with various levels of excitement and fortunately a good general direction.



It was difficult in some respects, because programmers Andreas, Peter and Stefan lived in Sweden; Rico (artist) was based in Oxford; and Allister was down in deepest, darkest Devon. I was up in Wakefield and because the internet was still a twinkle in someone's eye, we had to phone each other up and send game builds, music and art either in the post or using modems. It wasn't really until 1992-93 that we had 'speedy' 14.4Kb modems.

Needless to say, it was slow going. There was no email and it was a lot of time on the phone, or the train, or the plane – and hovercraft, such was the trip to southern Sweden via Copenhagen, before the impressive bridge they've build to the Swedish mainland since those heady days.

But – and this is the key – it was fun, exciting, bleeding edge and totally ad hoc. And it felt great. We were just young guys with little to no experience, simply wanting to create something of value and worth. And we liked a beer, so new games were discussed in the pub. I liked those days a lot – we still try to hold strategy talks in the pub, especially now we're fully independent again, since it reminds me of the roots and that feeling again.

RG: You had members of the team scattered all over the world. It must have been a real logistical nightmare pulling stuff together, even with early access to the internet…

MB: We didn't have internet until late 1995! We'd already moved into our current offices and got most people in-house when the net arrived – a bit too late and we'd already had three years of major success. That said, it helped in many ways but crippled us in many others, through online games, browsing and other 'interests'.

Working with people all over Scandinavia, Germany, Italy and France was very exciting and interesting, though, and pretty much all were huge Amiga fans and of similar ages, with similarly passionate beliefs in what they were doing. We had a hell of a lot of fun, in a lot of crazy places – they were great times. We certainly burned the candles at both ends, and, in some respects, I've still not quite got out of that habit when I should be growing old gracefully.

We also worked with a couple of guys in Oldham, which was a lot less cosmopolitan but no less fun. I remember a few very boozy afternoons with Dave and Haydn, who did *Assassin* and *Overdrive*, as

their local served pints of beer for just over 80p back then. Dave went on to become a technical director at a US EA studio and Haydn was one of the leads on THQ's recent *Darksiders*. I love that old friends go on to work on all these big titles and it gives me no end of pleasure telling my kids that some of my friends did this, that or the other on their new games.

RG: Many of your early games were extremely similar to classic arcade games of the time. Was this a conscious decision to copy the designs of popular games, or was it just a case of wanting to make fun arcade titles?

MB: It's certainly a case of the latter. There was very much a conscious decision to try to deliver a standout title in most of the popular arcade-style genres rather than copy titles, as such. It's fair to say that there was a lot of influence from classical titles – both *Sonic* and *Mario* in *Superfrog*, for example – and we put a Team17 spin on them. We felt the Amiga was a really capable machine and just wasn't getting 'arcade-quality' editions; just the usual ST/Amiga 16-colour, 512Kb ports from other publishers.

We spent a lot of time looking at the classic titles that inspired us and we tried to emulate, but it was never a case of going anywhere so close as to contravene any legal issues. I mean, we didn't do anything like *Great Giana Sisters* or *Katakis*, which were pretty close to *Super Mario Bros* and *R-Type*, and I believe injunctions were sought on both those titles.

RG: Similarly, many of your titles would have special editions or a director's cut. Was this just a cynical marketing ploy of rehashing an old game, or a way of giving the definitive title to your fans?

MB: Well the easy option would have been to just stick out the original game at a budget price point and move on, but we saw an opportunity to effectively remaster the titles based on user feedback, extend the content and, in some cases, give a radically different game experience. *Alien Breed Special Edition* had a bigger and much wider scope than the original game and managed to stay at number one for 33 consecutive weeks, *Project-X* was much easier, and *Assassin* saw his boomerang replaced with a gun.

RG: Team17 has published some amazing games on the Amiga that were originally done externally: *Worms*, *Super Stardust*, *Assassin*, *Qwak*. What did you look for when publishing games?

MB: The way we were set up meant that most games in the first few years were created with external or contracted staff. The Team17 office was principally project management, PR, design direction – that was me – and publishing, sales and marketing. We looked for opportunities all the time, but titles and the teams we took on really had to share the same ethos and have a quality title where possible.



With external teams, we worked pretty closely with most of them and in many cases helped refine and enhance the games quite considerably – good examples of this were *Qwak*, *Worms*, *Arcade Pool* and all the titles originating out of the Swedish team that did *Alien Breed*, *Superfrog* and such. A lot of the guys ended up working full-time in-house as the games industry changed and went through a period of large growth and expansion of development and production levels.

RG: *Worms* became a huge success for Team17 and was one of the first 2D games on Sony's PlayStation. How hard was it to convince Sony that a 2D game would be popular on the machine?

MB: It was a big problem at the time, although it was handled by Ocean Software, who published on console platforms and we published on home computer formats. At the time of the PlayStation's launch in 1994/95 there was a terrific drive to 3D games almost to the extinction of 2D, which was seen as basic and 'past it', which is even more ludicrous given the performance of casual, social games and even the DS these days. I was aware that initially Sony didn't really see a fit for the game on the platform, but relented in the end.

I think the industry went through an obsessive technology drive where the gameplay took a back seat to technology. With *Worms* it was all about the gameplay, which is perhaps why it stood out at the time of release. Fortunately the public voted not only with their hard-earned cash, but also for many awards, such as BBC's *Live & Kicking* viewers' award.

RG: Were you prepared for all the success that *Worms* brought you? Was it hard finding a balance between developing new titles and making new *Worms* games that would undoubtedly sell well?

MB: Absolutely not. We'd had moderate success on the Amiga and made quite a name for ourselves, but the Amiga market was quite small and suffered from incredibly high levels of piracy, so while we had chart-topping games, we never experienced massive volumes of sales.

Worms became a phenomenon and the original team was pretty small – 15 or so – but it was at a time when production values were soaring and the team and people grew rapidly, with lots of platforms to support.

It was also so huge that demand for new titles and more versions meant that plans for other titles were put on hold and, in many cases, lost their

> "We were reliant on Worms because it was all publishers wanted to hear about"



» Team17 celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Martyn started getting into programming properly at the tender age of **15** when he got his Spectrum in 1982

For his **30th** birthday Martyn received a framed copy of Henry's Hoard, an early Spectrum game that he wrote while at college

There are a total of **11** fighters in the Team17's brawler Body Blows, although in single-player mode the player is limited to **4**

Martyn is a massive videogame fan and owns an impressive number of consoles. His collection includes; **2** 360s, **2** PS3s, **4** PSPs, **5** DSs, **1** Wii, **3** PS2s, **1** Xbox, **1** N64 plus a ton of old stuff in boxes

Team17 celebrates its **20th** birthday this December

As its levels were random, the original Worms featured over **4** billion possible levels

PC Gamer awarded the original Worms **40%**. Not surprisingly, it was the game's lowest score



» [Amiga] *Superfrog* created the closest thing that the Amiga had to a mascot platformer.

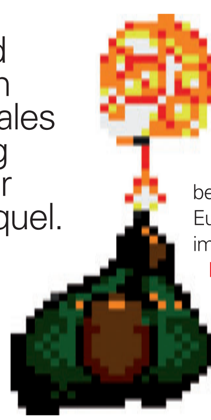
focus and impetus. As time wore on we became pretty reliant on *Worms* as a company because it was all publishers wanted to hear about and we couldn't take the massive risk or investment in new titles.

RG: What effect did your rapid growth and becoming a developer, rather than a publisher, have on the company?

MB: With 60-70 staff, pretty soon it was costing in excess of £2 million to run our studio on an annual basis, which meant it was very difficult to take anything but prudently calculated risks. I'm sure anyone who's run a studio will know the difficulties involved and pretty much most decisions were all about ensuring that the company could survive going forward. As a developer, rather than a publisher, we also saw a lot less income than we would if we'd been publishing, so that was something difficult to take after our successful publishing experience. After a few years we became trapped in an industry that only wanted solid IP and wouldn't take many risks without the developers funding it. We expanded our remit to consider working on third-party IP as well as *Worms*, since we'd tried without success with a number of original ideas.

RG: Why has there never been a sequel to *Superfrog*?

MB: A few reasons really. The first one was that the team were pretty exhausted after the first game. It was perhaps the most balanced, considered, and slickest of our earliest games, and that came at a psychological price – I don't think I've ever felt as burnt out after a game since, although maybe *Worms Armageddon* did that too – so there wasn't a big rush to make more. It also suffered massively from piracy, so its sales were never big enough to spur an obvious sequel. We've toyed with some *Superfrog* ideas over the years, and he's turned up in a few games as a cameo character. I'm not 100 per cent convinced that the platformer is the most popular game genre these days and without a huge sales history to back it up, I'd say the chances of another game are pretty slim. A shame, as I dare say that I could stomach looking at a new *Superfrog* game 17 years on!



RG: Is it true that you had conversations with id Software about an Amiga version of *Doom*?

MB: A speculative fax went to id, yes – remember: this was prior to email – and there was no interest. To be fair, the Amiga was a huge European success and I can't imagine it being on id's radar.

RG: Can you tell us about some of your cancelled games and why they were cancelled?

MB: Like most developer/publishers, some of our titles

didn't make it to the finish line. Usually this is for one of a few reasons: a loss of faith in the product; the publisher decides, for some commercial reason, that it no longer makes sense due to market trends, research, competing titles; or development issues, whereby there could be multiple problems. Some games don't manage to get very far into their gestation period at all and fail early, which is the best possible solution – and one that modern prototyping is all about – but occasionally some games get very advanced before it's obvious that they need to be parked or stalled.

Early examples for us are *King Of Thieves*, which was essentially a fantasy/pirate edition of *Alien Breed*. It was clear that some months in, aside from Rico's fabulous artwork, the game simply wasn't going anywhere and the decision to cull it was made, especially with the Amiga market heading into fast decline in 1993-94.

RG: Have you been forced to cancel any of your more recent projects?

MB: We've not cancelled a full game for some time now, mostly due to more effective prototyping and a far greater consideration of commercial placement of the titles, which is important when balancing the income of the studio and people's livelihoods.

The last major one was perhaps *Worms Battle Rally*, which was canned as part of a deal with a publisher in 2003. The game was effectively a kart-based frag rally featuring *Worms* characters and weapons, and the publisher just didn't fancy it and ended up, through their market research, building *Worms Forts* instead – which was effectively canned by them too and later picked up and published by Sega after *Worms 3D*.

Cancelling a title is by no means something we do lightly, but sometimes it really is for the best, as long as it's done early. Fortunately, most developers these days are aware of the commercial responsibilities and understand a lot of the decisions, even if they are difficult at the time.

RG: More recently, you were working on franchises for other people – *Lemmings* immediately springs to mind. What does it feel like working on the creations of others?

MB: It's something we welcomed, actually. After doing a lot of *Worms* titles and trying to get original titles signed up, it was a breath of fresh air working on a title that we knew would be published and needed a new lick of paint. We really enjoyed remaking *Lemmings* for Sony and it was very successful. There's always opportunity to add things to existing IP and it put some drive back into the studio. Nothing stops us from working on *Worms*, third-party IP and new ideas all at once, so it wasn't a case of swapping one thing for another.

RG: Why do you think *Worms* has become such an enduring franchise?

MB: We've discussed this for many years. It's a combination of many things: humour, social play, the fact that its simple-yet-deep strategy is great fun online, can be personalised and is highly replayable given the random positions and landscapes. People always have ideas for it and find it very entertaining. It's also possible to get a good version on most platforms, which means that the experience is generally pretty good. From the iPhone to the 360, to PC, to PSP, to PS3 – they all play very well.



> "You can get a good version of Worms on most platforms, from the iPhone to the 360"

RG: What franchise are you most proud of and why?

MB: Given its success, I'd have to say *Worms*, really. It was against all odds back in 1994/95 and is still going strong 15 years on, which is quite incredible. We've had some rocky moments, and despite pleas to create the 'perfect edition', we're always looking to do just that. Although those commercial pressures don't always allow us endless time and energy to keep tinkering and adding!

RG: Do you own any of the current-gen consoles and, if so, which are you most impressed by?

MB: I have all the consoles. I'm pretty much keen on checking all the new games, both from retail and digital. In terms of impressing me, I would only consider the PS3 and 360 as true 'next-gen'. The 360 impresses me most as a games console since Xbox Live simply blew me away when I first experienced it a few years back, and convinced me that's where Team17 should head, especially as I was getting increasingly dispirited with the retail games and triple-A industry.

The PS3 has really grown on me in the last year or so. It's got its act in order online and digitally, and it's a great media hub for Blu-ray and all that. I have two of the original ones that emulate the PS2, which was important at the time, since my kids had a few PS2 games they really like, although we never touch PS2 games any more. I also like the fact that games are not region-locked on these platforms and I could get *Rock Band* on the PS3 well in advance, but I know exclusives irritate the hell out of consumers. Games look great in 1080p too, but there aren't too many running at 60Hz simply because technically that's a bit of an ask.

RG: Digital content is an area you're now moving into. How important do you think this will be to Team17 in the near future?

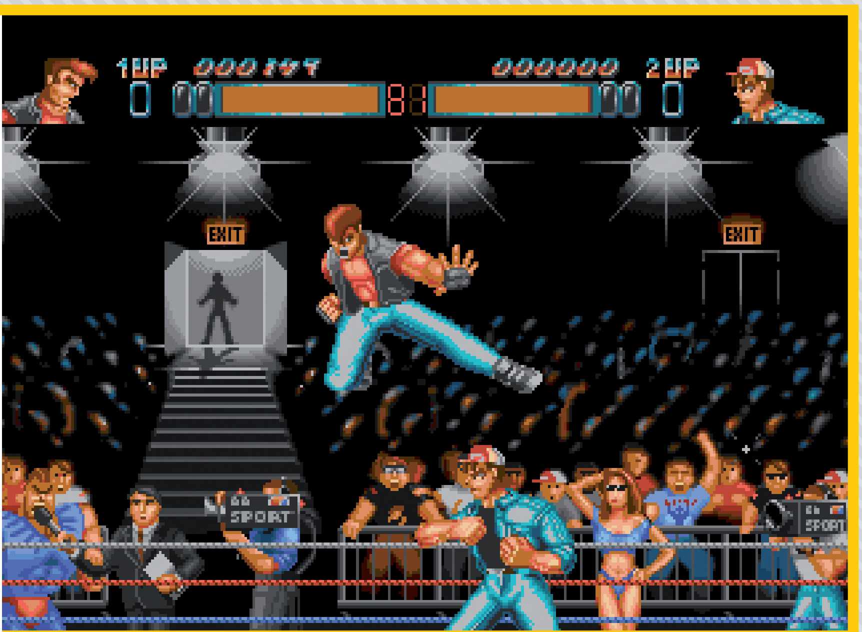
MB: Right now we have no plans to do any retail-focused titles, so it's all download. It's also allowed us to publish again and be in control of everything we do, for better or worse. I'd say that means it's pretty important, then!

RG: Where do you see the videogame industry in ten years' time?

MB: I'm afraid that's a really big call. Certainly all digital, certainly all on-demand, possibly all cloud-based and probably with minimal physical controllers – gesture and movement driven – and likely all 3D, as in visually. I don't think it takes a particularly clever person to say that, since we're on the verge of all that already. It'll depend upon a format hitting mass market at the right price, very fast broadband being cheap and freely available and, of course, highly evocative and interesting games to play. Despite that, I still imagine my eldest still plundering *World Of* bloody *Warcraft*. In commercial terms, I think one of the biggest shifts will be from publishers, as they are at retail today, to distribution platforms – the App Store, set-top box, Google, Live Marketplace, etc. Things are afoot for publishers and I think the next few years will be very telling in particular. I think the questions really are how we'll consume the larger products if retail isn't an option, because storage may well be, and it'll depend on the internet speeds on a mass-market level and the right piece of appropriately priced attractive hardware to appeal to households and the gaming public. I think possibly in ten years gaming will fully earn the 'interactive entertainment' tag and be really capable of 'putting you in the movie', which is what a lot of people are banging on about. As someone who's been playing games since the Seventies, I'm not sure if that's really what I want, as I find myself wanting slower experiences as I get older!

RG: In a way, you've almost come full circle with the release of *Alien Breed Evolution*. That amount of creative freedom must feel pretty damn nice after all this time.

MB: Once more we are masters of our own destiny, developer and publisher. We can control what we develop and how we develop it – and when we finish it. Of course, that's tempered by the commercial responsibilities of running a game studio that needs £300,000 per month, every month, simply to operate. When I started, teams were small and development was cheap, even if we didn't realise it. We were naive to the point of it being useful to be largely unaware of any commercial responsibility in what we were getting into. I wish it was the same these days, but the market has developed into a dramatically more difficult and competitive one. Fortunately, we are armed with 20 years of experience and one franchise in particular that is known the world over. The most painful thing in the last 20 years has been watching a lot of other developers get acquired or simply close because of market conditions. I've seen a lot of friends and talented people suffer at the hands of bad business calls. But yes, we have come full circle and it's great to be back and not going through the pitching process with third-party publishers – which threatened to drive me far away at one stage. Now, if there was only a new Amiga…



» [Amiga] *Body Blows* was favourably compared to *Street Fighter II* on its release.



» [Amiga] *Worms* has been the foundation of Team17's success since its original release.



» [Amiga] If you can finish *Project-X* without losing a life, consider yourself some kind of gaming wizard.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Martyn. Here are the answers for just a few of them

Was Team17 inspired by the Japanese console counterparts, like releasing the game *Body Blows* as the Amiga's answer to *Street Fighter II*?
Yeah, I'd say that's a fair suggestion. We tried hard to bring arcade quality to the Amiga without any compromises. Dan, who was the artist and designer on *Body Blows*, was a huge fan of Neo Geo fighting titles at the time, and I think it was *The King Of Fighters* and that ilk that were his inspiration.

Where does the nickname 'Spadge' come from?
Just something from my youth, and it's an endearing Yorkshire term.

Have you considered porting your back catalogue of games for XBLA and/or PSN?
No. There are a number of reasons for not doing so; mostly it involves a lot of work hunting down source and fixing the games for emulators. It's easy enough to play them through emulators, to be honest, and I think that other than for hardcore fans, it's of limited appeal.

What is your favourite non-Team17 game?
I have so many, but in recent times I probably enjoyed *Mass Effect* the most. I rarely get a chance to fully play games through and I did with zest, and even halfway through it again in readiness for the sequel.



Did you ever go after the *Aliens* licence for *Alien Breed*?
We enquired and had little success. We did briefly have the IP for *Rollerball*, the cult violent sports film. I was massively keen on doing that sport as a game, but MGM took the rights back.

Will you ever bring out *Superfrog* on the DS?
There are no plans for this, nor many other DS titles since the platform is suffering terribly in terms of piracy. So much so that we wouldn't consider working on any DS games.

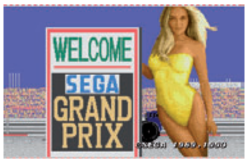
Would you ever consider releasing your unreleased Amiga titles – *Final Over Cricket, Pussies Galore* – whether complete or uncompleted, as a thank you to your old Amiga fans?
No, there's no chance of that happening. I'm not even sure what benefit releasing something broken and unfinished would be – or how it could be a 'thank you'.

Special thanks to Martyn for taking time out of his busy schedule to make this interview possible.

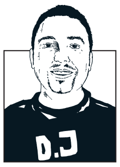


SUPER MONACO GP

HELPING THE MEGA DRIVE RACE INTO POLE POSITION



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** RACING
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+



HISTORY

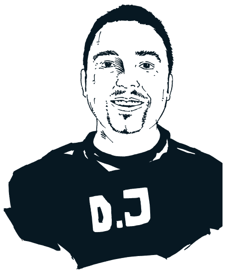
***Super Monaco GP* was the kind of game that made you proud to be an early Mega Drive adopter. With the SNES still in development and 8-bit machines like the Spectrum and NES struggling to convey the intricacies of the later, more powerful arcade machines, Sega's console felt like a breath of fresh air. Little wonder it went on to become by far its most successful console.**

As with many early Mega Drive games, Sega's racer offered two distinct modes of play: there was an extremely close replication of the original arcade game that saw you hurtling around a surprisingly faithful rendition of the Circuit de Monaco, and a far more advanced World Championship mode that offered you exceptional value for money as it took an age to complete.

Starting off with a fairly weedy car, you were pitted against a selection of other racers and had to slowly work your way up the leaderboard by constantly switching teams and cars, with the goal of eventually winning the F1 world title. It's easier said than done, though, thanks to 16 increasingly tough AI opponents that were all based on drivers from the 1989/1990 Grand Prix season. With their names changed due to Sega's unwillingness to secure an official licence, you got to race against the likes of A Asselin (Alain Prost), G Turner (Johnny Herbert), and the terrifyingly tough to beat G Ceara (Ayrton Senna) – your final opponent and an absolute nightmare. Little wonder he went on to star in Sega's sequel.

Play the game today and it still manages to hold up tremendously well. The audio is rather grating on the ears – especially when you change gears – and the visuals lack the wow factor that once made you the envy of your friends back in 1989, but its gameplay remains as polished, entertaining and pleasurable as ever. Oh, and any racing game that allows you to send the flag man flying into the ether whenever you hit him is always worth a play.


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» It's always a quiet period for games at this time of year, but we've still found some right crackers for you to enjoy. Planescape: Torment gets a 10-year re-release and there's a whole host of new iPhone games to discover

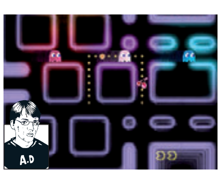
PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Planescape: Torment
A decade on and it's still one of the best RPGs that I've ever played.



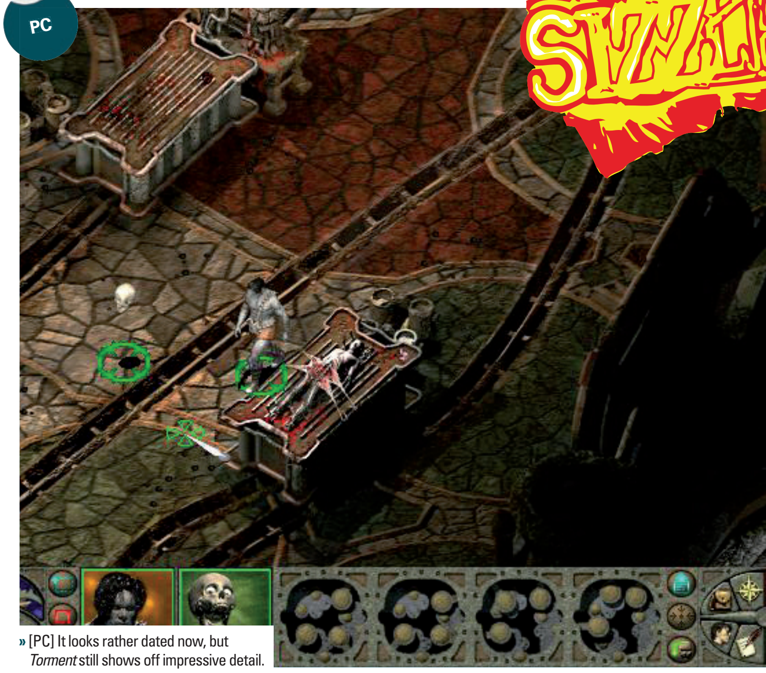
STUART
Driver
Boasting great visuals and controls, this is a fantastic reworking of the PSone classic.



ASHLEY
Pac-Man CE
I think that Darran and Stuart have been unfair on this. It's a great adaptation.

» PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [PC] It looks rather dated now, but *Torment* still shows off impressive detail.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Planescape: Torment



» *Planescape* uses the Infinity Engine. Other games that use it include both *Baldur's Gate* games and the *Icewind Dale* titles

» *Planescape: Torment* began life in 1997 as a 47-page document. It was originally known as *Last Rites*

» Actors in *Planescape: Torment* include Mitch Pillegi, Sheena Easton, Jennifer Hale and Dan Castellaneta



» [PC] It's the beautifully crafted characters that really help to bring *Torment* to life.

Planescape: Torment

A DECADE ON AND STILL AMAZING

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £17.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** INTERPLAY
- » **DEVELOPER:** BLACK ISLE STUDIOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» The first *Dungeons & Dragons* videogame appeared on the Plato in 1974. Since then over 70 games have been released, ranging from brilliant titles like *Eye Of The Beholder* and *Baldur's Gate*, to truly shambolic releases like the best-forgotten *Iron & Blood: Warriors Of Ravenloft*.

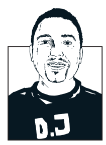
WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
BALDUR'S GATE (PC)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS (PC)





Recently re-released to celebrate its tenth anniversary – has it really been that long? – one of the greatest role-playing games of all time is now readily available to anyone who wishes to sample it. Based on the *Planescape* campaign setting, *Torment* tells the story of the 'Nameless One', who wakes up on a mortuary slab one day with no memory of his former self. Worry not, though, for Black Isle Studios' superb game soon reveals itself to be a world away from the many generic fantasy storylines that you'll usually encounter in this sort of game.

Indeed, what makes *Torment* such an enjoyable and immersive experience is the incredibly deep world that Black Isle Studios has created. Characters are extremely well fleshed out with distinct personalities and their own motivations, the world itself is full of mystery and wonder and features plenty of memorable locations, while the intricate story is as good as anything you'll find in the likes of *Dragon Age: Origins* or *Mass Effect*. Hell, we'll go as far as to say it's actually better and remains one of the best examples of the genre.

Of course, PC gaming has come a long way in the past ten years, and *Planescape*'s low-res visuals aren't quite as impressive as they were a decade ago, although there are handy patches online to rectify this. Everything, while still well detailed, is rather drab and dour, and the occasional uses of FMV are poor to say the least. Fortunately, though, it's the story and gameplay that's all-important in *Torment*, and Black Isle Studios has succeeded admirably. *Torment*'s interface is wondrously simple to use, there's a huge number of different items to use and discover, and while combat is fairly simplistic, it remains satisfying when taking down larger adversaries.

It may feel like an interactive novel at times, but *Planescape: Torment* remains a truly sensational title that every gamer should experience. It really is that good.

OPINION



Yes, there's a lot to read, but *Planescape: Torment* is a staggeringly good RPG. It's rather drab, but the superb characters and wonderful writing makes its world seem far brighter than anything on current machines. An outstanding RPG that just gets better with age.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

It's certainly aged visually, but Black Isle Studios' one and only visit to the *Planescape* multiverse remains an unforgettable experience. One of the greatest role-playing games of all time.

» Scores

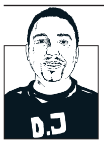
Presentation	85%
Graphics	80%
Sound	88%
Playability	96%
Addictivity	98%

Overall 95%

Pandemonium

YOU'D BE NUTS TO DOWNLOAD THIS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



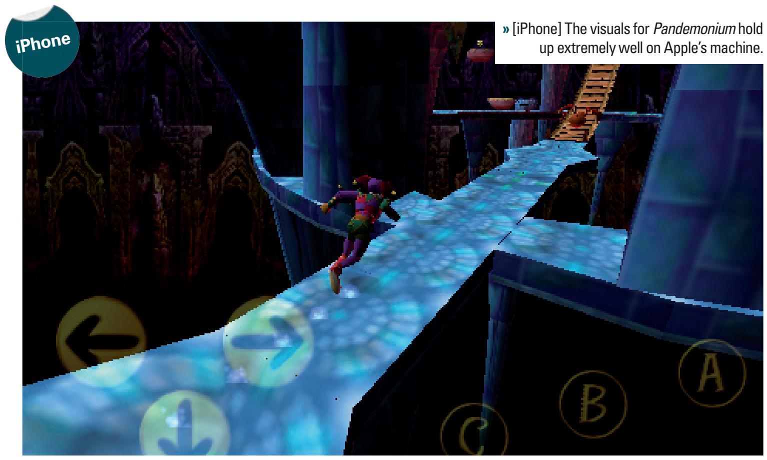
The most impressive aspect of Electronic Arts' port of *Pandemonium* is just how amazing it still looks. Squeezed onto the iPhone's tiny, razor-sharp screen, it looks utterly sensational, with decent polygons, slick animation of lead characters Fargus and Nikki, and plenty of graphical variation throughout each fairly lengthy stage.

Sadly, while the visuals have aged extremely well, EA's sensational-looking port is let down by some extremely poor controls that greatly ruin what would have been a fun, nostalgic experience. For starters, the virtual D-pad directions are separated and it's all too easy to miss one as you're moving left and right. A far bigger issue, however, is the unresponsiveness of the available virtual buttons. While it's not really a problem on earlier stages, it becomes ridiculously hard to move Fargus and Nikki around as the game progresses, and you'll often plummet to your death or miss a jump because the controls just weren't fast enough to respond to your frantic presses.

It's a real annoyance that *Pandemonium* is hobbled by such stodgy controls, because the actual level design and gameplay is still good fun – well, it would be if you could play it properly. For all its aesthetic splendour, *Pandemonium* just isn't much fun to play. It's still worth considering at its current low price-point, but we'd urge you to definitely reconsider if the cost climbs any higher. One for the truly hardcore fans only, we're afraid.

» Scores

Presentation	45%
Graphics	85%
Sound	70%
Playability	55%
Addictivity	40%
Overall	**48%**



» [iPhone] The visuals for *Pandemonium* hold up extremely well on Apple's machine.



OPINION



Sadly this is another case of a fantastic-looking iPhone game marred by problematic controls. *Pandemonium* looks great, and the design has aged well, but the later stages can prove infuriating when you fall to your death because of the controls.

Stuart Hunt



Qix++

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» Those expecting something matching the brilliance of the arcade original will be disappointed. We've no problem with the minimalistic graphics, the annoying music or the pointless multiplayer mode – good luck finding a game, by the way – but the paltry 16 levels makes this horrendously expensive. Add in the fact that DLC is already confirmed and *Qix++* is nothing more than a cheap and nasty rehash.

» Score **41%**

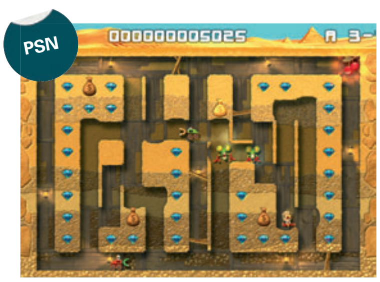


Burger Time Deluxe

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» Well this is a mess. While we can forgive *Burger Time*'s oversized levels, horribly naff graphic design and hopelessly twee music, the controls are unforgivably bad. The virtual D-pad is stupidly unresponsive and you'll constantly overshoot ladders and run into enemies through no fault of your own. A disappointing port that will give iPhone cynics plenty of ammunition. Steer well clear.

» Score **35%**

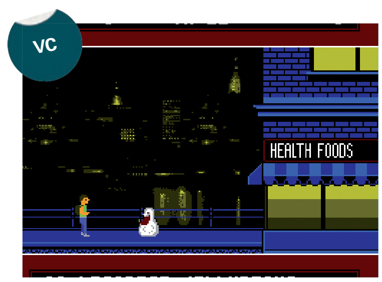


Digger HD

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» With *Mr Do!* looking unlikely to ever appear in downloadable form, this is your best alternative. Sadly, despite having extremely similar gameplay, this remake of an old PC game just doesn't feature the same clever level design and tight controls of the Universal classic. While the original PC mode is included with this release, there's simply not enough here to justify the high price tag.

» Score **55%**



A Boy And His Blob: Trouble On Blobonia

» **SYSTEM:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

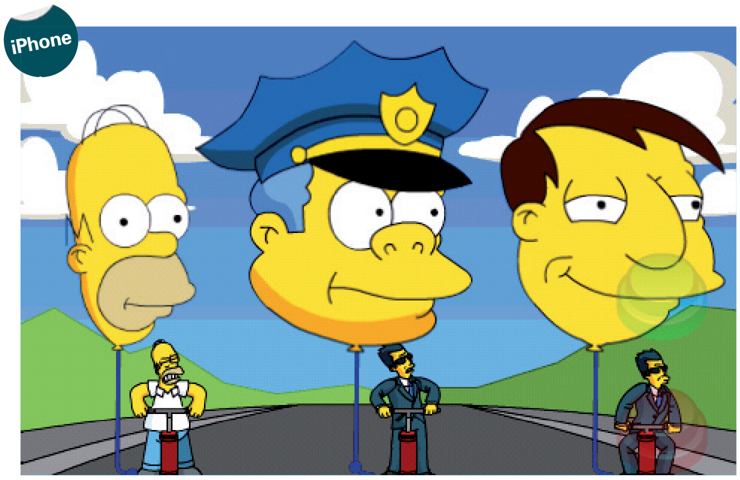
» After falling in love with Wayforward's remake, the NES original feels even crustier than we remember. While there's no denying the inventiveness, clumsy controls and tricky puzzles make this one for masochists. It's a nice reminder of how inventive Activision once was, but you should stick with the Wii update.

» Score **65%**

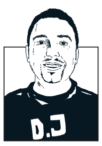
The Simpsons Arcade

COME BACK, KONAMI! THE SIMPSONS NEED YOU!

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



» [iPhone] One of the few instances of this new game stirring fond memories of the original.



Those expecting a portable version of Konami's classic arcade game are going to be disappointed. While it certainly borrows elements from the hit arcade brawler and looks sensational, this is a world away from Konami's fantastic scrolling beat-'em-up.

The biggest issue – although one that, we're sure, could be fixed at a later date – is that you can only play as Homer. Granted, you can pick up power-ups that enable you to team up with other members of the family for a devastating attack, but it's just not the same. Then, of course, there's the fact that all the humour has been seemingly sucked out of *The Simpsons'* universe, giving this new fighter a sterile, soulless feel about it. There are none of the humorous little touches that appeared in the original arcade game, and while



Homer's on-screen antics raised the odd smirk, it was more because we were amused by just how far the mark had been missed.

If *The Simpsons Arcade* fails to raise a smile, it does at least play pretty well, with responsive virtual controls that rarely let you down. Unfortunately, the lack of multiplayer support and dull level design and simplistic moves does mean EA's game gets tiring pretty quickly, and its weedy difficulty level means that you're likely to complete it after only a couple of attempts. Like we said, severely disappointing.

OPINION

I'm a huge fan of the original but sadly not so much of this iteration. While it looks and feels nice, the lack of Lisa, Bart and Marge as playable characters is too noticeable to brand this with the *Simpsons Arcade* name. It's missing the original's humour and is lacking in many areas.

Stuart Hunt

» Scores

Presentation	65%
Graphics	86%
Sound	68%
Playability	62%
Addictivity	55%

Overall 58%



» [iPhone] The police can be a real nightmare to shake, so Tanner will need to drive like a pro.

Driver

TANNER'S BACK, AND NOW HE'S ON THE ROAD

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** GAMELOFT » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



While we had our doubts initially that *Driver*'s tetchy controls would suffer terribly when making that bumpy transition to Apple's portable, our fears were allayed as soon as we sped through its usually notoriously sticky tutorial garage level, which has thankfully been simplified, without blood spraying from our ears.

We actually found the controls to be surprisingly responsive, with left and right steering positioned at the bottom left-hand side of the screen, including a handy wheelspin and handbrake manoeuvre, and your accelerator and brake pedals positioned opposite, lending a natural and comfortable feel to the controls. And while it took us a few embarrassing attempts to settle into the driving, after a few missions we found that we were rounding the game's 90-degree street corners with satisfying ease and were flying through its many missions.



Gameloft has done a great job with this iteration. The graphics look great, the gameplay feels smooth, and apart from the omission of the excellent Director mode, all the original modes and options have been carried across. It even features some new extras, such as the ability to use cruise control, and the welcome addition of some *GTA*-style radio stations that bleat out some suitably Seventies-style songs and plant you firmly in the driving seat of a classic cops and robbers chase movie. If you're a fan of the original game, this is a must-own.

OPINION

Driving games are often tricky on the iPhone, but Gameloft has handled this conversion brilliantly. The graphics are excellent, the gameplay is as solid as ever, while the controls never let you down. The loss of the Director mode smarts, but this remains very impressive.

Darran Jones

» Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	80%
Sound	88%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	85%

Overall 88%

Pac-Man Championship Edition

NAMCO, WHERE ARE YOUR PAC-MANNERS?

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPHONE/IPOD TOUCH » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX LIVE » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



Based on the bestselling Xbox Live Arcade game from 2007, this iPhone update might add plenty of new mazes, but all is not quite what it seems.

The game is split into three game modes – Championship Mazes, Mission Mazes and Championship Mazes – but not all are included in the price. So while the addition of new content is nice, complete access to all of the mazes on show – and this includes the entire list of Championship Mazes and 100 of the 120 Mission Mazes – requires you to fork out for an additional expansion pack. In that respect, it's almost like being expected to pay for a demo of the game.

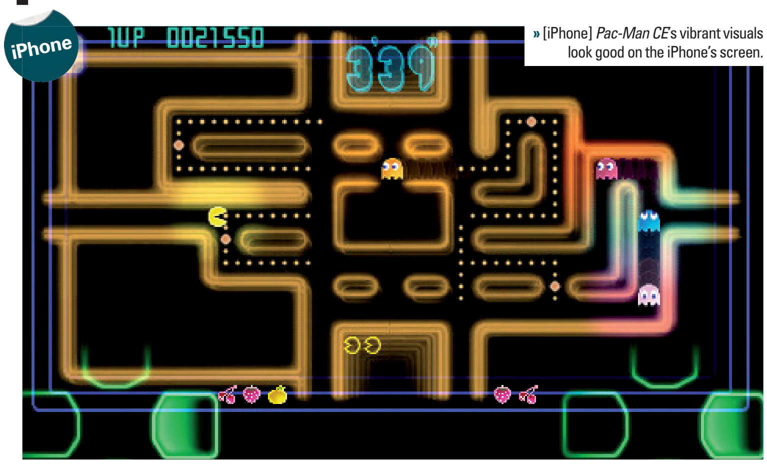
And sadly, the problems don't end there. This portable iteration can be maddening at times. But this has nothing to do with the challenge posed by the missions – the difficulty level of the game is pretty much pitch perfect – but rather the touch-screen controls. While it's nice to be given the choice of four control options, we found them all to be unresponsive at times, allowing for these moments where you miss important turnings through no fault of your own and your game, especially on the stringently timed Mission Mazes, is thrown into complete jeopardy.

While the variety and visuals remain great, we just found the cheekiness of expecting customers to almost instantly fork out for extra content and the tetchy controls too much to stomach. If you're a massive Pac-fan then you might be able to look past these flaws. Everyone else, we'd advise sticking with the excellent Xbox Live version instead.

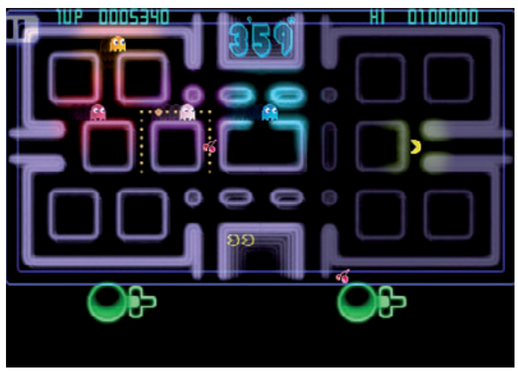
» Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	70%
Sound	75%
Playability	55%
Addictivity	85%

Overall 59%



» [iPhone] *Pac-Man CE*'s vibrant visuals look good on the iPhone's screen.



OPINION



Oh woe. I was desperately looking forward to a portable version of one of my favourite XBLA games, but this just isn't up to it. Considering the nature of the game, this needs responsive controls, which it just doesn't have. What a shame.

Darran Jones

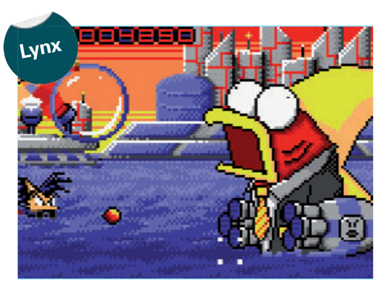


Military Madness: Nectaris

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **The popular PC-Engine** title receives a reboot, but somewhere along the line the magic has been lost. While we can forgive the bland visuals and annoying soundtrack, the gameplay lacks sparkle and consists of dull encounters let down by fiddly controls. Fans will glean some enjoyment but everyone else should steer clear.

» Score **58%**

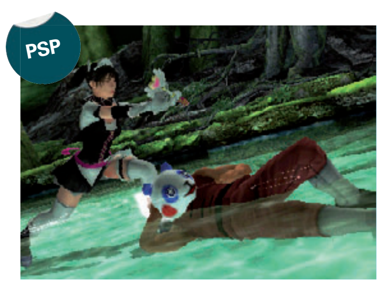


Zaku

» **SYSTEM:** ATARI LYNX
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Super Fighter Team** turns its attention to Atari's Lynx for its latest release and the end result is an extremely fun shooter. The graphics look sensational, with large enemies and bright, vivid characters. Level design is also solid, although Zaku himself sometimes feels a little too large for the screen. Aside from that, this is a slick shooter that Lynx owners should definitely consider.

» Score **73%**



Tekken 6

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» **It obviously loses** out when confined to the PSP's small screen next to its console big brothers, but *Tekken 6* remains a surprisingly fun brawler. There's a decent range of gameplay modes, a healthy selection of characters and, best of all, no naff scenario mode. The controls obviously suffer a little, but this remains a great little beat-'em-up that no fan of the genre should be without.

» Score **85%**



Super Monkey Ball 2

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **After the** disappointing *Super Monkey Ball*, Sega returns with a sequel that's superior in every way. Controls work exceptionally well, and there's a massive number of cleverly designed levels to plough through. Best of all, though, is the excellent Monkey Bowling and the news that Monkey Target is on the way as well.

» Score **82%**

» SERIOUS SAM HD

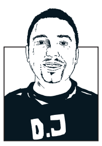


» [XBLA] There are lots of weird and wonderful monstrosities in *Serious Sam HD*. They all die to your weaponry, though.



SO MANY MONSTERS, SO LITTLE TIME

Serious Sam HD



The first-person shooter genre has come a long way in the past few years, so it's refreshing to see a game that sticks two fingers up at convention and delivers a delicious old-school experience.

A high-definition update of Croteam's 2001 blaster, *Serious Sam HD* is effectively what you'd get if you were to splice *Doom*'s DNA with *Duke Nukem*'s. It's not intelligent, it's not clever; it's just an insane romp through time that sees you battling some of the zaniest-looking enemies to ever appear in a first-person shooter. And yet, even now, some nine years after its original release, *Serious Sam HD* works and offers a refreshing alternative to the complicated blasters that are cluttering up the PC and 360 libraries.

The visuals, while not exactly cutting edge, nevertheless hold up well thanks to reworked textures that still manage to show off an impressive amount of detail, while the lighting effects found in the old tombs that Sam explores can take the breath away at times. *Serious Sam* has always been about speed, however, and in this instance Croteam's engine certainly doesn't disappoint. Even when the screen is filled with enemies, the action remains fast and furious, giving *Serious Sam HD* a refreshingly old-school feel that fans of early sprite-based shooters will absolutely lap up.

Despite his endeavours remaining refreshingly old-fashioned, *Serious Sam HD* is still far from perfect. Level design feels fairly basic, often being little more than a wide-open area where you can be assaulted by wave after wave of identical-looking enemies, while the available multiplayer has been drastically cut down from 16 players on the PC to just four on Xbox Live, meaning that it's nowhere near as fast and furious.

Ultimately, however, *Serious Sam HD*'s biggest sin is repetition, and lots of it.

While it's initially quite fun getting constantly hounded by a selection of utterly insane, and increasingly large, enemies, the joke does start wearing thin. Having said that, many will know exactly what to expect from Croteam's game, and in terms of delivering an injection of ridiculously fast-paced first-person excitement, *Serious Sam HD* succeeds admirably.

In a nutshell

Yes, it gets extremely repetitive, and yes, it's little more than a *Doom* clone dressed up in fancy high-definition visuals, but *Serious Sam HD* still proves to be a lot of fun.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** MAJESCO ENTERTAINMENT
- » **DEVELOPER:** CROTEAM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Serious Sam* was first released on the PC in 2001 and immediately attracted attention thanks to its fast-paced action, tongue-in-cheek humour and slick visuals. *Sam* soon proved too big for just the PC, however, and later games moved over to the GameCube, Xbox and even the Game Boy Advance.

OPINION



Serious Sam may have been released just nine years ago, but its retro roots could clearly be seen. Despite its upgrade, those roots still shine through, and while it does run out of steam quickly, it remains a fast and furious blaster that offers a lot of fun.

Stuart Hunt

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Serious Sam HD

» ***Serious Sam HD* is a remake of the 2001 PC game *Serious Sam: The First Encounter***

» **Before the Croatia-based Croteam found success with the *Serious Sam* franchise, it was best known for the 1994 game *Football Glory***

★ WHY NOT TRY

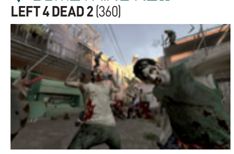
▼ SOMETHING OLD

DUKE NUKEM 3D (PC)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

LEFT 4 DEAD 2 (360)

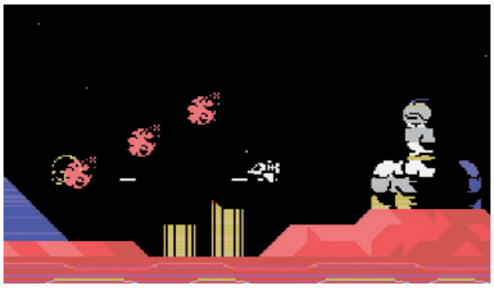


» Scores

Presentation	65%
Graphics	80%
Sound	68%
Playability	79%
Addictivity	72%
Overall	**73%**



I wonder if anybody actually reads these introductions apart from my mother, and even then I'm not sure she's paying attention. But anyway, the new year is upon us and it's traditional to make resolutions, so for 2010 I've decided that mine will be 320x200 pixels with 16 colours. One day I'll have to stop doing that 'joke', because it's close to wearing out…

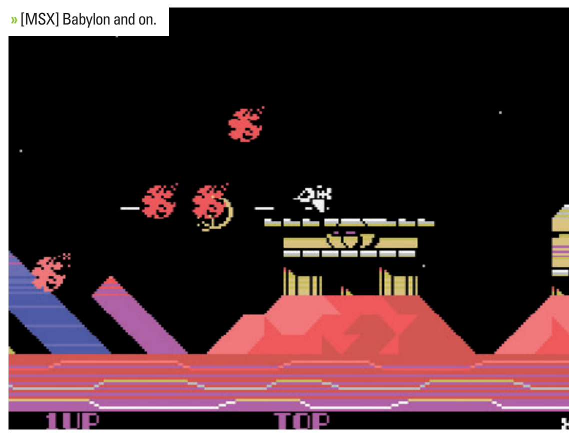


» [MSX] Eating my way deeper within.



» [MSX] Futuristic cities: bad for parking.





» [MSX] Babylon and on.

SHOOTING STARS NEVER STOP

RETALIOT



FORMAT: MSX
DEVELOPED BY: VIDEO HAZARD
LINK: MSXDEV.MSXBLUE.COM
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

The MSX series has a fine heritage when it comes to shoot-'em-ups. The popularity of the range in Japan led to it being a regular stomping ground for some of the genre's biggest guns, while coin-op producers such as Konami, Taito and Namco handled the conversions of a significant number of their own licences, and other names such as Compile spent their formative years on the MSX. More recently, there have been a couple of space-bound blasters to be discovered among the entries into the annual MSXDev competition, including the excellent horizontally scrolling *Universe: Unknown* (released in 2005 and available from the same link as *Retaliot*) and the vertically oriented *Seleniak*, a simple but fun little game released during 2004 and utilising some neat programming trickery to circumvent the usually rough scrolling of the MSX.

That latter title is the one we're interested in right now, because a quick jump forwards by five years finds previously titular heroine Erika Seleniak about to face a new mission. With their leader Ciggy Starlust defeated in the previous game, the alien hordes are out for revenge, and to that end have been searching for the legendary Wyrm, a weapon of mass destruction so potent that it's been hidden away for centuries, divided into its component parts and scattered out over four uninhabited worlds. After learning of these plans, Erika must fly her sleek space fighter into danger, navigating around these worlds to search for the components of the Wyrm, all the while keeping an eye out for assailants and explaining to them the error of their ways. With a large gun.

The standout feature of *Retaliot* really has to be the scrolling. It's joystick-controlled, bi-directional, and moves very smoothly indeed; remarkably so considering the level of colour and detail in the backgrounds presented by each of the four play areas – there's even a touch of parallax scrolling and a slow-moving starfield in the background for a little depth. The sprites over the landscape are single-colour but well-defined, and there are lots of objects moving around smoothly during play, including some almost surreal bonus items.

Retaliot isn't faultless as a game, however, and the overall score we've given reflects that. Collision detection is sometimes on the flaky side, particularly against the faster-moving attackers; the parts of the weapon of mass destruction that require ferrying over to the starting point don't always get their cue to drop into place when delivered; and there's one particular attack wave that turns up a few levels into the game that essentially drops nasties onto the ship from a great height without warning – but it's got that certain and sometimes frustrating something that can drag players back for another try.

It's excitingly significant as a technical milestone for the hardware as well. Now that smooth scrolling with detailed backgrounds has been done on the MSX, we can hopefully look forward to more games using similar techniques in the future.

83%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

GHASTLY NIGHT

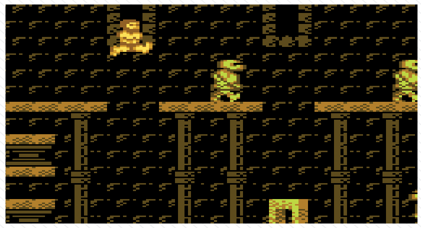
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** BROTHERS PRODUCTION
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/Y8A3SMA » **PRICE:** FREE

Ghosts 'N' Goblins variants seem to be the in thing at the moment, and this effort was originally written 15 years ago but gathered dust until it was rediscovered and released during December 2009. The single-screen platforming and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*-inspired action is reminiscent of GR8 Software's 2008 Atari 8-bit release *Hobgoblin* or *Ghost 'N' Zombies* for the ColecoVision, but it's nowhere near as playable.

It's relatively little details that spoil it, really. The armoured hero is given a sword to strike at the hearts of his enemies but has to be standing on top of them for it to have any effect and, unlike *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, the loss of the hero's armour also removes the sword and his ability to defend himself, leaving him quite literally nude. But the killer problem is the difficulty level: while *Hobgoblin* was tough, this game is truly impossible. Even with the supplied infinite lives version, it's frustratingly hard.

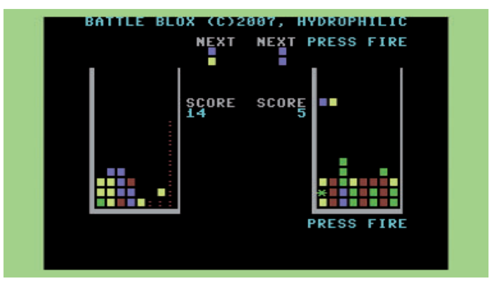
36%





» [Atari 8-bit] They've let the garden go!





» [Commodore 128] Man versus machine.

BATTLE BLOX

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 128 » **DEVELOPER:** ROBERT WILLIE
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YDRQBLF » **PRICE:** FREE

Written in 2007 but not released until the end of last year, *Battle Blox* is an action puzzle game for one or two players designed to take advantage of the dual-screen output of the Commodore 128, with players competing either on the same screen or, more interestingly, using a monitor each.

The gameplay itself is similar to *Puyo Puyo*, in that blocks fall into the play area in pairs and the players must group them by colour. Occasionally a star enters the arena and, when this settles beside a cluster of blocks matching its colour, they all disappear, earning points for the player.

The graphics and sound really are primitive, but *Battle Blox* at least plays a reasonable single-player game and, if your Commodore 128 is equipped with two monitors, competing against an opponent when neither of you can see the other's progress can be quite exciting and open up interesting tactical avenues. It's just a shame that there isn't more 'bling' to this release, really.

70%

KING'S VALLEY

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

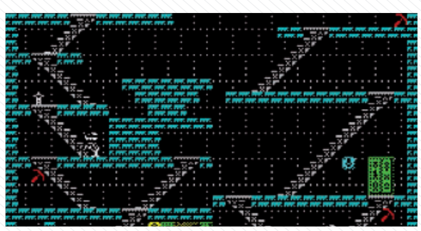
» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** RETROWORKS
» **DOWNLOAD:** RETROWORKS.ES/KINGSVALLEYRK_EN.HTML » **PRICE:** FREE

According to the instructions issued with this MSX to Spectrum conversion of Konami's *King's Valley*, Vick is a famous British explorer who hails from Manchester. He isn't there right now, of course, because there aren't any Mystery Jewels to be found there; they're waiting in Egypt, so that's where Vick has headed.

These artefacts aren't unprotected, of course. Each tomb has a couple of mummies lumbering around, and some of the gems are locked away and need some lateral thought and a pick axe to reach, and Vick can only jump when not carrying anything else.

This is perfectly suited to the Spectrum. The cute if somewhat repetitive music of the original has been pushed straight over from the MSX along with the sound effects, and the graphics have been tweaked, adding some extra colour and detail to the screens. But it's the incredibly sneaky level designs that make *King's Valley* really worth some dedicated playing time.

89%





» [Spectrum] I want my mummy!

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 8-bit] *Moon Shuttle* on a supercharged Atari.

» Christmas Past

AtariAge regular Rybags wrote a game called *Moon Shuttle* for the Atari 8-bits around a quarter of a century ago; a simple affair where the player guides a rocket vertically as it passes through asteroid fields at a fixed horizontal speed. What makes it worthy of note is the recently released upgraded version that is one of the first to support VBXE, a video hardware expansion for the Atari. Download it at: **www.atariage.com/forums/topic/154854-new-game-revamprelease-moon-shuttle-vbxe-edition/**



» [Spectrum] Stop… hammer time!

» Christmas Present

Bob Smith has scored a double whammy this issue by sneakily releasing two action puzzle games for free download. The first is his newest game, the *Chu Chu Rocket* inspired *All Present And Correct*, which went out just before Christmas 2009 – so far too late for it to appear anywhere near Christmas in the mag – while the second is *Stranded*, which was previously only available through Cronosoft. **www.bobs-stuff.co.uk** is his website.

» Christmas Future

The sixth instalment of the *Spectrum Games Bible* series was recently released, and this one should be of interest to anybody who likes homebrew games, because it covers a huge number of releases from 1994 to nearly the present day. If it's anything like the previous issues, it should be a great read, and if all goes to plan we'll receive a review copy in time for next issue. Check **www.spectrumgamesbible.co.uk/book6.htm** for more information.

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» You Need Hands

There's a neat remake of the C16 platform game *Fingers Malone*, probably the only game ever released to feature as its lead character what appears to be a smiling suitcase that was also a talented safe cracker. At the time of writing, the Hungarian-language website of developer HomeGnome doesn't have any information on the release, but here's the direct download link provided over at the Retro Remakes forum: **homegnome.uw.hu/fingersmalone.zip**



» [PC] Moo!

» I Dare You

Ludlum Dare 16, a 48-hour game development competition, the previous instalments of which have produced some neat little games, was held over a weekend back in December. Over a hundred new games were released, including a parody of edutainment 'classic' *Oregon Trail*, whose name we sadly can't print because it contains an expletive – the entire competition should be considered unsafe viewing for those of a nervous disposition – where the original's realities of dysentery or typhoid are merged less than seamlessly with action and over-the-top physics. **www.ludumdare.com/compo/ludum-dare-16/?action=preview**

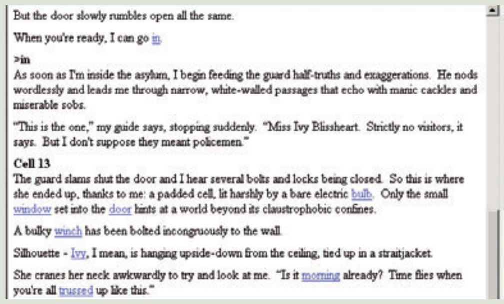
FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on *Retro Gamer*'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at *Continuity*.

THIS INITIALLY LOOKS easy: move blocks of the level around, then zoom in and navigate through to the exit. But the touching edges of each screen must line up exactly or transit isn't allowed, and eventually the screens will need juggling while the player plummets to his potential doom! **www.continuitygame.com**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING…



WALKER & SILHOUETTE

» DOWNLOAD: TINYURL.COM/YET92ED



Nathanial Walker, a member of the landed gentry who works as a detective, and Ivy Blissheart, a carefree flapper whose previous career as master criminal the Silhouette saw her on the opposite side of the law, are brought together and charged with solving a murder in what would almost pass as the Twenties if it weren't for some anachronistic details, some more obvious than others.

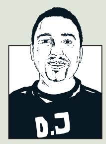
The user interface is keyword-based and the game helpfully highlights pertinent words for the player to click. This removes the grind from proceedings and allows the engaging and amusing story of Nate and Ivy's investigations to be told, and the only complaint we had was that it didn't last longer.

Remake of the Month



MAGIC PLANET SNACK

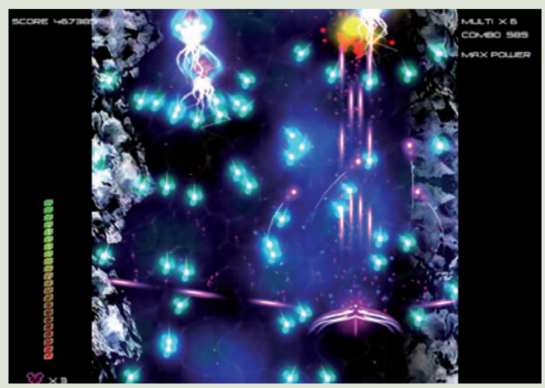
» DOWNLOAD: WWW.LAZERCATZ.COM/GRMA.HTML



Wizards, eh? They natter on about magic and all that, but what happens when their spells go wrong? In this case, one has been transformed into a worm with an insatiable appetite that must devour worlds literally by burrowing through them from surface to surface. If that was everything there would be very little fun, but some parts of the planets such as glowing lava and the buried cat-like familiars are fatal to the touch, and if enough magical orbs are collected, the wizard/worm goes hyper and everything around him temporarily becomes snack food.

The plot is strange, the graphics similarly bizarre, but it's playable and, to a degree, frustratingly addictive with it in the short term. *Magic Planet Snack* isn't a classic, but it's entertaining on a dark evening.





IRUKANDJI

» DOWNLOAD: WWW.CHARLIESGAMES.COM



The first thing to strike players is that *Irukandji* is extremely pretty to look at, with lots of swirling trails left behind by the glowing objects as they glide around and all manner of pyrotechnics. The second thing is that it doesn't take prisoners.

There's just one underwater-themed level, populated by trigger-happy marine life and culminating with a boss battle against a giant, glowing crab. After mastering the level and going on to unlock the six ships on offer, the game then shifts its focus from merely staying alive to racking up massive scores. Each ship has its own armaments and the challenge comes from finding the best way to utilise them, both to maximise scoring and release power-up pods that beef up the guns and increase the multiplier.

Although its squarely aimed at fans of the shoot-'em-up genre and possibly won't suit every player, *Irukandji* presses a lot of positive buttons. For anybody who is unsure but enjoys a good blast, there's a demonstration version available to download that offers the level itself and two of the six ships as a taster, but with the price tag being so low and the surprising amount of variety and challenge offered by the full package, it's worth just diving in for the majority of shoot-'em-up lovers.









» **Above:** [PC] The game that started Charlie's Games.
» **Above Right:** [PC] Charlie's next blaster, *Scoregasm*.
» **Right:** [PC] Insert double entendre of your choice here!

HOMEBREW HEROES

THE HERO THIS MONTH IS **CHARLIE KNIGHT**, THE MAN BEHIND CHARLIE'S GAMES AND DEVELOPER OF SHOOT-'EM-UPS BULLET CANDY AND THE RECENTLY RELEASED IRUKANDJI. WE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM TO FIND OUT A LITTLE MORE

Retro Gamer: What was it that initially got you into developing indie games?
Charlie Knight: Just a general interest in programming and games really. I always liked the idea of making a game, but never really tried until bought myself one of those Anglepoise iMacs when they were first released. That was pretty much the starting point, just fooling around making silly graphics things and half-hearted attempts at making games. Nothing really too serious until a couple of years later, when I decided to have a go at writing something I could finish. It took a few iterations before I got it to look and play how I wanted – I've got countless really awful attempts backed up – but I eventually ended up with my first proper game, *Bullet Candy*.

RG: And what brought about the birth of Charlie's Games as a one-man publishing empire?
CK: Well, it's not really a publishing empire. It's a bit more like the online equivalent of some bloke trying to sell you something you've never heard of in the back room of a pub. I like the idea of writing games full-time, so I try my best to earn a few quid by selling my games. That's about as far as the empire goes really.

RG: To date you seem to be specialising in shoot-'em-ups – which is no bad thing, of course – but do you have any plans to explore other genres?
CK: Yep. I'm pretty keen on doing something different. I like games where you explore stuff, so at some point in the not too distant future I'm going to have a go at something like that. In the more immediate future, I've got *Scoregasm* to finish off, and a *Track & Field*/*Punch-Out!!* hybrid about an arse-kicking competition to do – the theme tune is amazing. I'm also hoping to make a music game/toy thing with John Marwin. We've talked briefly about it, and we're both fairly keen and full of ideas.

I do like making shooters, though. *Irukandji* took about two and a half weeks to make, so I guess you can expect a few more along those lines too.

RG: Of the games released so far, which would be the game you're most proud of and why?

HIGH FIVE
The homebrew games Charlie can't live without

1. **VVVVVV** – A totally amazing piece of design. It's really compulsive!
2. **Cogs** – Probably the most addictive puzzle game I've played since *Puzzle Bobble*.
3. **Quest of Yipe! 2** – I've been playing this one for years. It's very silly, and the home-made sound effects are great.
4. **Starguard** – Just a really fun, well-made run-and-gun game. The time trial bit is ace too.
5. **Rom Check Fail** – It's just great.

CK: I don't know. I like them all for different reasons. *Bullet Candy* for being the first game I finished, *Space Phallus* for the retro audio/visuals, *Irukandji* for the massive amount of maths involved in procedurally animating a giant enemy crab, and *Scoregasm* just for being super awesome.

RG: Speaking of *Space Phallus*, did the… uh… 'adult' theme present itself because of the visual style?
CK: Other way round, actually. I think my brother and I were joking around about a game with cocks, and the 8-bit theme was born of a desire to spend as little time as possible drawing them. Probably, though, the game would be less funny and more creepy/weird if I'd made the graphics 16-bit, if you can see what I mean.

RG: What would you consider the most enjoyable and difficult parts of developing a game?
CK: The most enjoyable part for me is the first time a part of the game looks and feels exactly like the idea I have in my head. I don't like working from a design, so all my ideas develop from a mental image and evolve into different things as the game takes shape.

I find the most difficult part is keeping motivated and focused; I'm much too easily distracted. Along with difficult bits, there are boring bits like coding menus, and excruciatingly annoying bits, like spending two days looking for a bug and discovering that I'd mistyped 'from' as 'form'.

RG: And finally, what advice can you give to any would-be indie game developers who might be reading?
CK: Stay focused, and make something cool.

BARGAIN HUNT

DESPERATE TO FINISH OFF YOUR RETRO COLLECTION? WANT TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ALL THE BEST BARGAINS BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO GO? THEN VISIT **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET/BARGAIN_HUNT.PHP** AND DISCOVER ALL THE CLASSIC MACHINES THAT YOU'LL EVER NEED

You've been asking for it forever, but we're pleased to announce a brand new look for **Retro Gamer**'s Buyer's Guide section that makes it incredibly easy to get your hands on all the best retro bargains.

Using our new search engine couldn't be easier. All you need to do is select a manufacturer and machine from the pull-down menu. Once you've found the system you're after, the magic of the internet will search eBay for the top 20 ending items, meaning that you'll be able to gauge the market's health with very little effort. This month, Darran's been looking for some console bundles.



Head on over to the excellent **www.retrogamer.net** and click on 'Bargain Hunt' or visit **www.retrogamer.net/bargain_hunt.php**



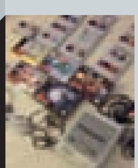
Put in the details for the greatest computer in the world and discuss with your staff writer why it's so much better than the ZX Spectrum.



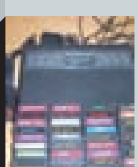
Swoon in delight as you find yourself getting ever closer to collecting all the £1.99 *Simulator* games that Codemasters ever released.

eBAY BARGAINS

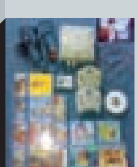
Retro Gamer has been scouring the world's most popular auction site to find the best bargains out there…



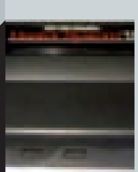
■ This SNES ended up going for £87. Expensive, but it included *Killer Instinct*, *A Link To The Past*, *Donkey Kong Country* and *Tetris Attack*.



■ £54 snagged an Atari 2600 and 34 games. None boxed, but it did include *Space Invaders*, *Ms Pac-Man*, *War Lords* and *Yar's Revenge*.



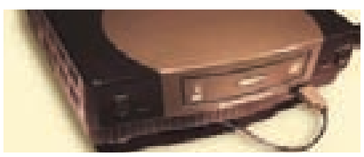
■ One of the best Dreamcast bundles ever and one that Darran would have snapped up if he didn't already have the games. All for £100.



■ This is Darran's new MS II. £33 seems steep, but it's converted to switch between 50 and 60Hz. *Operation Wolf* and *Ghost House* sweetened the deal.

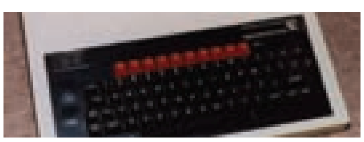
3DO

3DO GOLDSTAR	£45+ ($81+)
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)	£40+ ($74+)
PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)	£20+ ($37+)



ACORN

ARCHIMEDES	£30 ($55)
ATOM	£50 ($92)
ELECTRON	£10 ($18)
BBC MICRO	£15 ($28)



AMSTRAD

CPC 464	£10+ ($18+)
CPC 664	£90+ ($165+)
CPC 6128	£25+ ($46+)
GX4000	£50+ ($92+)

APPLE

APPLE II	£30+ ($55+)

ATARI

400/800/600XL/XE	£20+ ($37+)
2600 (VCS)	£20+ ($37+)
5200	£30 ($55)
7800	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR	£20+ ($37+)
JAGUAR CD	£70 ($129)
LYNX I/II	£20+ ($37+)
ST	£20+ ($37+)

BANDAI

GUNDAM RX-78	£75+ ($138+)
PLAYDIA	£90 ($166)
PIPPIN (ATMARK)	£500+ ($921+)
WONDERSWAN	£10 ($18)
WONDERSWAN COLOR	£20 ($37)
WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL	£25 ($46)



COMMODORE

AMIGA 500/600/1200	£20+ ($37+)
C16/PLUS/4	£15+ ($28+)
C64	£10+ ($18+)
C64 GS	£30+ ($55+)
C128	£30+ ($55+)
CDTV	£20 ($37)
CD32	£25 ($46)
VIC-20	£10+ ($18+)



FUJITSU

FUJITSU FM	£100+ ($184+)
FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY	£200+ ($368+)



MISCELLANEOUS

BALLY ASTROCADE	£20 ($37)
BARCODE BATTLER	£5 ($18)
CASIO LOOPY	£25 ($46)
FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F	£10 ($18)
COLECOVISION	£30 ($55)
DRAGON 32/64	£8 ($15)
ARCADIA 2001	£10 ($18)
EPOCH CASSETTE VISION	£20 ($37)
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION	£30 ($55)
INTELLIVISION	£40+ ($74+)
ODYSSEY	£10 ($18)
ORIC-1	£20 ($37)
PLAYSTATION	£10 ($18)
SAM COUPÉ	£50-£200 ($92-$368)
SUPERVISION	£15 ($28)
TIGER ELEC GAME.COM	£15 ($28)
TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)	£10 ($18)
VECTREX (MB/GCE)	£80 ($147)
X68000	£90+ ($166+)

MSX

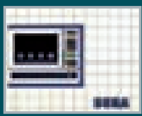
MSX 1	£10+ ($18+)
MSX 2	£20+ ($37+)
MSX 2+	£30+ ($55+)
MSX TURBO R	£30+ ($55+)

NEC

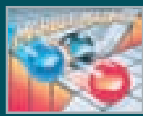
PC-6###	£10+ ($18+)

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

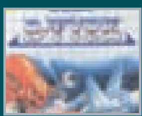
Retro Gamer sifts through the pages of eBay to report back on any items of interest, hardware or software that caught our eyes. This month Darran's digging through some Master System Games.



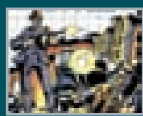
ZILLION
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£1.37**



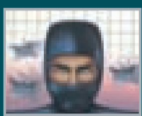
MARBLE MADNESS
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



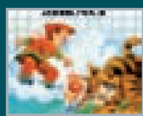
R-TYPE
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **No Sale**



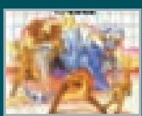
DEAD ANGLE
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£2.58**



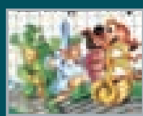
SHINOBI
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£2.78**



CLOUD MASTER
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£13.29**



PHANTASY STAR
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£37.46**



WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP
System: **Master System**
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£18.95**

PC-8801	**£20 ($37)**
PC-9801	**£35 ($65)**
PC-FX	**£50 ($92)**
PC-ENGINE	**£55 ($101)**
PC-ENGINE GT	**£70+ ($129+)**
TURBOGRAFX-16	**£30 ($55)**
TURBO EXPRESS	**£50 ($92)**
SUPERGRAFX	**£80 ($147)**
PC-E CD-ROM/ TURBOGRAFX CD	**£50+ ($92+)**
PC-E DUO/ TURBO DUO	**£120 ($221)**
DUO-R	**£80 ($147)**

NINTENDO

FAMICOM	**£60 ($111)**
FAMICOM AV	**£40 ($74)**
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM	**£70 ($129)**
SHARP FAMICOM TWIN	**£100 ($184)**
GAME & WATCH	**£1+ ($2+)**
GAME BOY B/W	**£5 ($9)**
GAME BOY POCKET	**£8 ($15)**
GAME BOY COLOR	**£12 ($22)**
GAME BOY ADVANCE	**£25 ($46)**
N64	**£10 ($18)**
N64 DD	**£150+ ($276+)**
NES (TOASTER)	**£15 ($28)**
NES (DOG BONE)	**£50 ($92)**
SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)	**£20 ($37)**
SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)	**£50+ ($92+)**
VIRTUAL BOY	**£80 ($147)**



PHILIPS

CD-I	**£20+ ($37+)**
CD-I 450/500	**£30 ($55)**
VIDEOPAC G7000	**£10 ($18)**
VIDEOPAC G7400	**£20 ($37)**

SEGA

32X	**£35 ($65)**
DREAMCAST	**£25 ($46)**
GAME GEAR	**£15 ($28)**
SG-1000	**£50-£150 ($80-$260)**
SC-3000	**£50 ($92)**
MASTER SYSTEM I/II	**£10 ($18)**



AMSTRAD MEGA PC	**£10 ($18)**
TERADRIVE	**£100 ($184)**
MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II	**£25 ($46)**
GENESIS 3	**£35 ($65)**
NOMAD	**£100 ($184)**
MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE	**£100+ ($184+)**
MEGA-CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**
PICO	**£20 ($37)**
SATURN	**£30 ($55)**
MEGA CD (SCD) I/II	**£50+ ($92+)**

SINCLAIR

ZX80	**£200 ($368)**
ZX81	**£70 ($129)**
ZX SPECTRUM 48K	**£10 ($18)**
ZX SPECTRUM 128K	**£40 ($74)**
ZX SPECTRUM+	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +2	**£35 ($65)**
ZX SPECTRUM +3	**£40 ($74)**

SNK

NEO-GEO AES	**£150+ ($276+)**
NEO-GEO MVS	**£70 ($129)**
NEO-GEO CD	**£100 ($184)**
NEO-GEO CDZ	**£80+ ($147+)**
NEO-GEO POCKET	**£20 ($37)**
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR	**£35 ($65)**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED COLLECTOR IS KRISTOPHER, A STUDENT FROM GEORGIA, USA, WITH A PENCHANT FOR HANDHELD GAMES



» "I'm Kristopher Polak, a 22-year-old student from Alpharetta, Georgia. I've been collecting handhelds for ages."



» "A shot of my entire handheld gaming collection. I started with the clear Game Boy Pocket when it first came out, and from that point on, I sort of developed a fascination with handhelds."



» "The limited edition Game Boy Lights are pretty difficult to find. I saw the red Tezuka Osamu one on eBay and became obsessed with finding the others."



» "This *Pokémon Pikachu* GB Printer is another one of my favourites. My mother tracked it down about eight years ago. I haven't seen another one since."



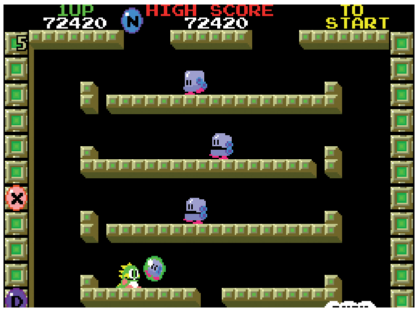
» "A slightly blurry picture of my custom-painted GP32 systems. The bottom is a Back-Lit Unit (BLU) and the top is a Front-Lit Unit (FLU). These really introduced me to the world of homebrew and emulation. They'll always hold a special place in my heart."



If you have a collection that you feel the rest of the **Retro Gamer** readership needs to know about, then contact us at **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk** and we'll do our best to get you in the magazine.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» [Arcade] Iordanis prefers the days of old when videogames were far less violent.

WAR IS HELL

Dear Darran,

My name is Iordanis Kousis from Greece and I am a big fan and admirer of you and your efforts on the magazine (I own every issue).

I don't want to trouble you, but I did want to mention an advert that I saw when I opened your last issue (71). I must say that I haven't taken much interest in the latest first-person genre games because it's not something I'm fond of. The advert in question was for a new *Call of Duty* game called *Modern Warfare 2*. The gist seems that there are people out there who want to teach/amuse my children by showing this brave new world just how modern warfare is. In other words, how super-equipped soldiers kill other people. I don't want to press the matter further – I think you get the point.

I know that this is not a new issue and I know that you are probably not responsible for those adverts. All I am asking is that you just think for a second about how these images could cause harm before you run them. I must say that I am a little disappointed that I saw such an image in a magazine whose mission is to bring joy to me. I will never allow my children or myself to get involved with these efforts to show/teach/bring "modern warfare" to the masses. After all, I belong to a video gaming genre (1980-1990) where gaming was really amusing and certainly never taught me to kill people.

Yours faithfully, Iordanis

We're sorry that you took offence at the advert in question, Iordanis. Unfortunately advertising is a great source of revenue for any magazine, particularly a niche one like Retro Gamer, so it's something of a necessary evil to ensure the success of a magazine. We will pass on your concerns to the relevant department though.

STAR LETTER

VIVA LAS VEGAS

Dear Retro Gamer,

Since you did not print my recent email that featured my ex-girlfriend dressed as the ninja from *Last Ninja 2* (goodness knows what you want if THAT doesn't get featured!) I decided to take some drastic action!

Last month I went on holiday to Las Vegas. As well as sampling all the sights and sounds of the gambling Mecca I tried to find some retro gaming machines. Sadly, Las Vegas's idea of an arcade is a big room full of rubbish games that reward you with tickets. Whacking a rat to try and get a million tickets to buy a pencil sharpener is certainly not my idea of fun.

So I gave up and gambled in my hotel, Planet Hollywood, on the strip. To my amazement I found a slot machine based on *Pong* and *Breakout*! There was even a feature whereby you could play *Pong* for money. Never before did I think that the Pong skills of my youth would reward me all these years later but indeed they did. By returning the ball and scoring goals against the computer player I earned a fortune – all right… a few dollars.

I even took a picture of the casino machine along with my copy of **Retro Gamer,** which of course I don't fly anywhere without. I may go back next year and see if they have a *Double Dragon* slot machine. Now that could see me retire…

Kindest regards,

Gary McGeechan via email

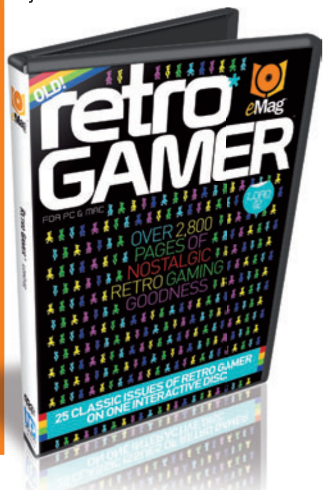


» Show off **Retro Gamer** in a swanky location and you too could win an eMag like Gary.

Sorry Gary, but we've only just found your original letter. Glad to see you're spreading the word of Retro Gamer, however. Have a prize for your trouble.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



GOOD CARMA

Dear Retro Gamer,

I've been reading your magazine now for about two years now (my first issue is the top 25 platformers one with the big Banzai Bill on the cover) and I'm enjoying it very much. My favourite system of all time has been the SNES, but these days the Nintendo DS also has some great games (as does the Xbox).

There are always great articles in the magazine – Making of *Super Metroid*, the Definitive guides – and I especially loved the interview with Peter Molyneux. I remember asking my mother for an advance on my allowance money right there in the store so I could choose between *Dungeon Keeper*



» [GBA] Despite finding huge success on the DS, *Phoenix Wright* started off on the GBA.

Next Month: David Braben



CONTACT US



Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

>> BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'Will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check in to hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

and *Carmageddon* back in the day. While *Carmageddon* seemed like a dream come true, I instead picked up *Dungeon Keeper*, because it was from the same team that made *Syndicate* and I wasn't disappointed, because *Dungeon Keeper* is a real classic.

One thing I do miss is the loss of the Retro Shamer articles, as they were great fun. I cannot imagine a lack of possible crappy games (for example *Catfight*, a horrible all-women beat-'em-up for the PC from the mid-Nineties which makes *Pit Fighter* almost look professional) so I'm really hoping the feature comes back.

Oh, and before I go I would like to know if you'll be doing any articles on Bioware's Infinity Engine and a complete history of the *Phoenix Wright* games. I know the last one isn't really a retro game, but it did originate on the Game Boy Advance.

Kindest regards,

Tim Vanbaelen via email

We've no plans for an article on *Phoenix Wright* yet Tim, but we have had a couple of Bioware pitches, so you shouldn't have too long to wait. As for Retro Shamer… If you have your copy of issue 72 you should be a very happy bunny. We'll also look into *Catfight* as well.

HARDBOOK HARDSHIP

Dearest Retro Gamer,

Your Videogames Hardware Handbook is amazing. Thank you for everything that it



>> [Arcade] We'll keep pestering Yu Suzuki for another interview but we can't promise anything, we're afraid.

does provide. However, I simply MUST voice my disappointment over one very LARGE omission: the ColecoVision.

You simply CANNOT cover 1977 through to the late Nineties without including the console that reinvented the home game market (at least it did in the states). The expansion shot! The steering wheel! The ability to play a competitor's games (the Atari 2600) The ADAM computer add-on! All this is overlooked with this one careless omission.

Please do keep up the outstanding work that you do, just extend it to cover the console that was most near and dear to my heart back in the day.

Thanks for listening,

Dan Peters Iowa, United States

We had a few people asking about the various machines that were missing from our recent Videogames Hardware Handbook, so we felt this was the perfect place to respond those queries. The bookazine in question was never meant to be a complete guide to the history of consoles as some seem to have thought, but was instead a look back at some of the best machines we've covered in the mag (hence it having 'Volume 1' attached to it; hopefully, a 'Volume 2' will follow at some point). Worry not though, as this very issue has a massive Colecovision article for you to enjoy.

> "You simply cannot cover 1977 through to the late Nineties without including the ColecoVision"

SHORT AND SWEET

Dear Retro gamer,

I have two simple requests for your excellent magazine. Can you do a Making of *Power Drift*, because I think it would make for a really interesting read? Also I would love to see a retroinspection on Sega's Master System, as it's one of my favourite machines.

Nick Moudios, via email

>>

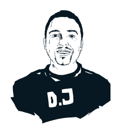
RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Ant Cooke
Joined:	1st April 2009
Location:	Birmingham
Occupation:	Student/Lackadaisy writer
Website:	http://gaminghell.110mb.com
Fave Games System:	Mega Drive

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: RIVER RAID

Why I picked it: It's one of my favourite Atari 2600 games and never gets old. **Handy advice:** You can swerve your bullet. Use this to get out of tight spots.



High Score: 14,480

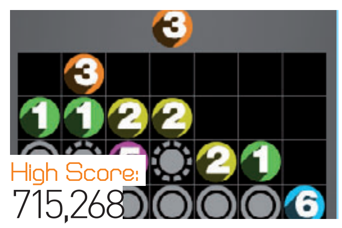


CRAIG

CHOSEN GAME: DROP7 (HARDCORE MODE)

Why I picked it: Because its retro-puzzle charm burrowed its way into my brain and refuses to let go.

Handy advice: Learn to chain and how each number can assist.



High Score: 715,268

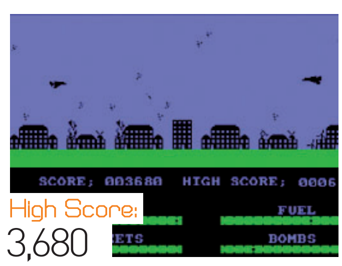


DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: HARRIER ATTACK

Why I picked it: To relive those lovely CPC memories - and to see if I'm still pretty poor.

Handy advice: I've improved little. Master shooting and dodging if you can. That's the key..



High Score: 3,680

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's you favourite Sabreman game?

Bub&Bob *Underwurlde* for me - found it bloody hard though.

the_hawk *Sabre Wulf* for me, I've never quite managed to handle the transition into 3D.

jdanddiet Same here... 2D ultimate rules!

Dunjohn Does *Killer Instinct* count? The closest I've come...

felgekarp Definitely *Underwurlde*; all that bouncing around.

nakamura *Sabrewulf*'s music in *K.I* was amazing. Never played anything else with him in though.

Sputryk Tough choice: *Sabre Wulf* or *Knight Lore*? Both are the pinnacles of their genres and, as a consequence, inseparable. I must be greedy and choose both!

paranoid marvin By the look of him, Sheriff Quickdraw is a pseudonym for Sabreman, so I'll go with Gunfright

markopoloman *Underwurlde* for me. Great on the C64 (unlike anything Sabreman did in 3D)!

DRS *Knight Lore*. Before, I was a contented C64 owner but this game induced pangs of jealousy. Damn you, Ultimate, for making me question my loyalties!

SirClive Sad to say that despite being a Speccy lover, I've never been that big on Sabreman games. I would plump for *Knight Lore* as I liked the day/night mechanics.

Antiriad2097 *Underwurlde* – the only one I've been able to complete.

Timothy Lumsden *Knight Lore* made me go wow – but *Sabre Wulf* kept me entertained.

Mire Mare *Underwurlde* on the C64, ultimately the only Sabreman game worth playing. Wouldn't it be nice to see some other Ultimate titles joining *Jetpac* on XBLA?

Darran@Retro Gamer I pitched a four-player version of *Sabre Wulf* on Xbox Live when I visited Rare for the *Jetpac* interview. I explained all my ideas and how all the Sabremen could compete and lay traps to stop each other. Still waiting for it to happen...

Mire Mare Chase it up Darran! That could be a delight to play! There's a whiff of *Spy vs Spy* to your brief description but that's all right by me. In fact I'd happily hand over MS points for a *Spy vs Spy* remake as well. I wonder if *Jet Pac* didn't do well enough for Rare/MS to consider further titles in the Ultimate back catalogue?

sirclive1 I'll go for the fabulous *Sabre Wulf*, what joy that game has brought to me over the last 25 years, remembering the cryptic instructions and the lack of screenshots before I played it just added to the mystique.

Roo I guess its up to me to be the one who says that *Sabre Wulf* on the Game Boy Advance really wasn't that bad a game. I'll vote for that – spread the Sabreman love, and all that...

kelp7 *Sabre Wulf* on the BBC. The sharp, colourful graphics and excellent spot effects made sure that collecting orchids had never been so much fun!

HalcyonDaze00 *Sabre Wulf*. Hours of fun as a kid just hitting the rhino and running away as it chased you...

Denny Haynes *Sabre Wulf* because I felt at the time it pushed the limits of the Speccy. *Knightlore* changed that but for 2D this was the tops. I also completed it without cheating.

Blakey *Knight Lore* I think. That game just amazed me when it came out... simply stunning graphics. Nowadays when I play it there's a little bit too much slowdown for my liking, but in the eighties I simply didn't notice. It's also the only Ultimate game I ever completed without cheating, so it has to be my favourite.

skinny *Sabre Wulf* on the Spectrum. I fondly remember completing my map of it, only for CVG to publish one the very next day!

stulec52 I'll be the first to go with *Pentagram* then, just to get in the mag! Hello Mum!

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

CINEMAWARE

bonerlaw Cinemaware made some awesome games (IMHO) throughout the late 80s/early 90s, and I know there are a few Cinemaware fans on here, so what are your fav games?

necronom *Defender of the Crown* was the first game I ever played on an Amiga, so it will always be special to me, and it brings back a lot of memories from that time.

AlleyKat *Lords of the Rising Sun* is probably my favorite. I really liked *Defender of the Crown*, *It Came From The Desert* and *Wings* as well.

Kilb *Rocket Ranger* and *The Three Stooges*

Mire Mare *Defender of the Crown*, again on the C64. It was the first Cinemaware game I bought and truly wowed me.

BEST NPC

SpifferRabbit Who do you think is the best non- playable character in a videogame? My votes would go to the following... 1. The Merchant from *Resident Evil 4*. 2. The Truth from *GTA San Andreas*. Who's yours?

SirClive Whats that dog with the guitar called in *Animal Crossing*? I vote for him.

Megamixer Probably the hostages in *Metal Slug* when they follow you and do Hadoken-type attacks every now and then.

SoupDragon Funniest (in a morbid way) was Chief Irons from *Resi Evil 2*. Most Annoying was The Fan from *Oblivion* – although there are a bunch of annoying ones. My best was Nemesis from *Resi 3*.

The Angry Jock I've said this before - Yusuf Amir from *GTA4: The Balled of Gay Tony*.

PLATFORMER HELP

Ralph Milne's Left Foot Righty... So I got my mate back into Mega Drive gaming and so far have got him a few games that he remembers from his youth. However, now he wants slow-paced platformers without too much shooting. Any ideas?

C=Style *Gods* is a bit slower-paced. Mind you, it was sped up by quite a lot over the Amiga version. Likewise, *Legend of Galahad* is also a slower-paced platform romp.

Roo *Dynamite Headdy* is a more thoughtful, slower-paced game than most other 2D platformers. However, there's a good few side-scrolling shooting levels. *Animaniacs*, *The Smurfs* and *Toy Story* aren't too nippy either. Stay far away from *The Pagemaster*.

Old vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Super Mario Bros* holds up best?

Super Mario Bros (NES Version)



New Super Mario Bros (Wii Version)



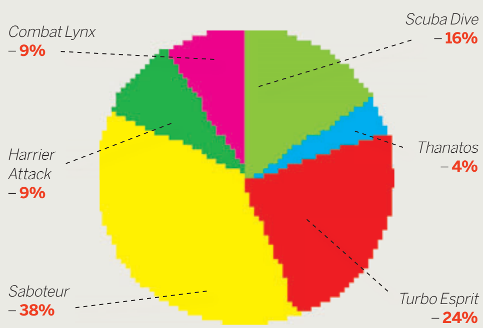
39% | 61%

Rinoa I'm going for the original. I played it to death, so it holds a lot of fond memories for me.

lanky316 The Wii game; the first time in years I've actually enjoyed a non-karting Mario game.

HOT TOPIC

Best Durell game?



"*Turbo Esprit*, but not the C64 version, which was cack" – **fgasking**

"Great to have a company who showed what the Speccy was capable of – and what the C64 wasn't" – **paranoid marvin**

"Definitely *Turbo Esprit* as it was one of my first Spectrum purchases and is still great fun today. I can hum the theme tune at will." – **Quaid**

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

We've already covered the Master System in issue 44, so we're unlikely to return to it any time soon now. As for *Power Drift*… As much as we'd like to cover it it's becoming increasingly harder to speck to Yu Suzuki, as he's apparently retired now. We'll keep trying though.

A CRASH SMASH

Dear Retro Gamer,

I've just this very second (well, five minutes ago) got my hands on Issue 71 and turned immediately to the 25 Years of Crash feature. After reading it, I'd probably say it was one of my favourite pieces that you guys have done in the past few years. Why? Well, it's probably going to sound clichéd, but Crash really was a huge part of my life back in the 1980s. Getting hold of a new issue, reading it cover to cover, taking it to school and discussing the reviews with all my friends. Wonderful times indeed. I could even compare the feelings that I got with each new issue of Crash to that when a new Retro Gamer hits the shelves.

So, thanks again and thanks to all the people who made Crash such a superb magazine.

Cheers!

Ryan via email

Glad you enjoyed it, Ryan. Darran was really chuffed to travel to Ludlow to meet Roger, Oli and Matthew and had a great time. There are some exclusive videos on his YouTube channel from when he visited them, so head on over to http://www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz for more information.

BROTHERS BEYOND

Dear Retro gamer,

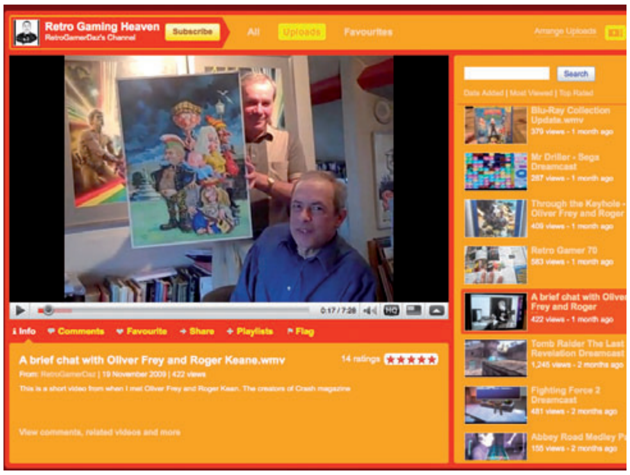
I've been reading the mag for about a year now and love the retro articles. My earliest gaming experience was on an Acorn Electron playing Cybertron, but it wasn't until my dad bought us an Amstrad 3286 PC that I discovered The Bitmap Brothers and the genius that was *Gods* and *Xenon II* and *The Chaos Engine* and *Magic Pockets* and *Speedball II*… *takes a breath*… phew...

Anyway, do you know whatever happened to The Bitmap Brothers? Their website seems to be stuck in 2007 and although there is a vague mention of *Gods* being released on the Gameboy Advance that's it. I have a DS and a 360 now: surely a couple of these titles would work on XBLA or the fantastic machine that is the DS?

Any thoughts?

Roger Barrett, via email

You're right, Roger; a lot of The Bitmap Brothers' games would work brilliantly on the likes of Live Arcade (interestingly, *Speed Ball II* was taken down from the service after Empire went bankrupt). We have interviewed members of the team occassionally in the past, but our last look back at the talented studio was all the way back in issue 41, so we're unlikely to revisit them anytime soon.



You can catch Oliver and Roger on Darran's YouTube channel

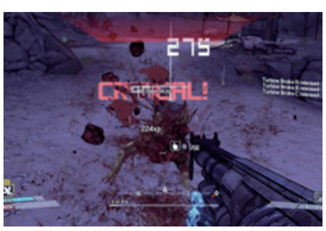
DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Lack of Snow

Darran and Stephen have been really peeved off with the lack of snow that fell in Bournemouth, as they were really looking forward to making ice sculptures of Sonic and Mario. Stuart, on the other hand, can't wait for the warmer weather, as his usual 45-minute trip home to Portsmouth took an astonishing 7 hours. He didn't even have any spare time to make a snowman on the way, which made him even more upset.

> "Do you know whatever happened to The Bitmap Brothers? Their website seems to be stuck in 2007"

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Borderlands

I've been working my way through *Borderlands*. I'm not usually a big fan of first-person shooters, but Gearbox's new game is structured like *Diablo* and *WoW*. I'd even say it's this generation's *Phantasy Star Online*.

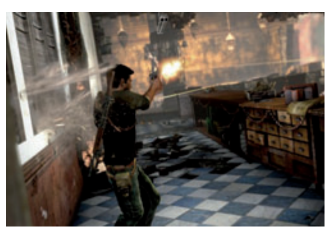




CRAIG

Orbital

Although not strictly a retro title, *Orbital* for iPod/iPhone has visuals that wouldn't look entirely out of place on a (souped up) Vectrex, and its one-thumb gameplay is pleasingly old-school, hypnotic and utterly addictive.





DAVID

Uncharted 2

I've been hammering the hell out of Naughty Dog's superb sequel and it really is tremendous stuff. It's another rip-roaring adventure with Nathan Drake that – literally – has one cliffhanger after another. Beautiful.

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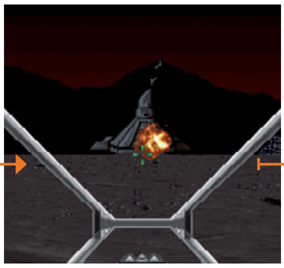
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ROBOCOP VERSUS THE TERMINATOR

Despite sitting at the smiley end of mediocre, a game that pitted RoboCop against Skynet ensured that even if the cartridge was sentient and wiped out the human race, it would have still sold like teabags











SCREEN 1
Having rebuilt himself after being pulled apart to create Skynet, Robo travels to the future to put a stop to the system's evil robot-manufacturing ways.

SCREEN 2
Robo then jumps into this thing: a handily positioned turret with its sights set on the Skynet building. We love happenstance in videogames.

SCREEN 3
With Skynet destroyed, its reign is no more. All that's left is to return to Detroit and write up the rather lengthy incident report. Paperwork sucks.

SCREEN 4
Oh yeah, there is no Detroit. Despite his best efforts, the world has still been ruined. Looks like Robo's going to be busy rebuilding a world from the ashes.

SCREEN 5
Finally, Robo triumphantly lifts up the twisted remains of a T-800, accompanied by some fluff about him always being there for us for as long as we need him.